





ANSELM McINTOSH  
SAULT STE. MARIE,  
CANADA  
*TIMBER & LAND*

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THE  
**CLAIMS OF OSSIAN,**  
Examined and Appreciated:  
**AN ESSAY**

ON THE  
**SCOTTISH AND IRISH POEMS**  
*PUBLISHED UNDER THAT NAME;*

IN WHICH  
THE QUESTION OF THEIR GENUINENESS AND HISTORICAL  
CREDIT IS FREELY DISCUSSED:

TOGETHER WITH  
***SOME CURIOUS PARTICULARS***

RELATIVE TO THE  
STRUCTURE AND STATE OF POETRY IN THE CELTIC  
DIALECTS OF SCOTLAND AND IRELAND.

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By the **REV. EDWARD DAVIES, F. R. S. L.,**  
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AND RECTOR OF ST. MARY'S IN THE GROVE, AND BISHOPSTON.

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"———Nothing extenuate,  
"Nor set down aught in malice."  
SHAKSPEARE.

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1825.



TO THE RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD,

THOMAS BURGESS, D. D.

LORD BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S, PRESIDENT;

AND TO

THE VICE-PRESIDENTS AND COUNCIL

OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF LITERATURE,

*THIS VOLUME,*

WITH THE TRUEST SENTIMENTS OF

GRATITUDE AND RESPECT,

IS SUBMISSIVELY INSCRIBED AND DEDICATED,

BY THEIR MUCH OBLIGED,

AND MOST HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.



## ADVERTISEMENT.



**D**URING the eighteen or twenty years which have elapsed since this Essay was written, the ardour of public debate upon the poems of Ossian has, indeed, considerably subsided : yet the Author cannot regard this as a sufficient reason why his tract should be suppressed, or be deemed wholly out of season.

The question may pause, but it is not decided. A learned and respectable body of our Northern neighbours still maintain the cause of their national Bard. [Many of their arguments remain unanswered, and Ossian is confidently quoted as historical authority.

The work, moreover, is not limited to this simple question. It embraces various elucidations of the general state and progress of poetry in the Galic

dialects of Scotland and Ireland. The subject may therefore be considered as forming an essential link in the chain of Celtic Antiquities.

It is conceived that it may not only prove interesting to those Cambro-Britons who are at this time rummaging the old stores of a sister dialect, but that it will present them with some useful hints, and salutary cautions.

For these and the like reasons, the Essay has been printed. About two hundred copies only of this edition are offered to the public at large,—the remainder being reserved for private distribution. To the learned members of the Highland Society the author would respectfully observe—That he has shewn no disposition to detract from the intrinsic merit of their national poetry. Upon the subject of its antiquity alone, and its historical importance, he has candidly declared an opinion, which arose, not out of prejudice but from probable grounds. If it can be shewn that his grounds are fallacious, he will with equal candour, retract an error, and subscribe to their well chosen motto—

MAGNA EST VERITAS ET PRÆVALEBIT.

# THE CLAIMS OF OSSIAN,

*EXAMINED AND APPRECIATED:*

Being an Essay to ascertain, whether the poems ascribed to the Caledonian Bard, are to be regarded as genuine remains of antiquity, and authentic historical documents, or merely as works of modern invention.

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SECT. I. On the internal marks of recent composition, in the poems published by Mr. Macpherson, under the name of Ossian.

SECT. II. On the alterations which Mr. Macpherson appears to have made, in the Galic poems, which he is acknowledged to have collected; with remarks upon the arguments which have been adduced, in support of the genuineness of those poems.

SECT. III. On the origin of the Galic poems, with some conjectures, relative to the principal hero whom they celebrate.

SECT. IV. On the principles of versification in the Galic poems ascribed to Ossian.

SECT. V.---FIRST ADDITIONAL. On the general evidence disclosed in those volumes which contain the original Galic.

SECT. VI.---SECOND ADDITIONAL. On the Galic text of the poems ascribed to Ossian.

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## SECTION I.

*On the internal marks of recent composition, in the poems published by Mr. Macpherson, under the name of Ossian.*



Introduction to the subject.---The editor's account of his originals unsatisfactory.---The anachronisms, upon the face of the poems, create a suspicion of their character---this suspicion confirmed---by the relation of fabulous events---by the description of the armour, characters, manners, and sentiments of the heroes---by the introduction of palpable fiction---by the ascribing of the same romantic adventures to a variety of characters---by the art of the poet, which does not accord with the age assigned to Ossian---by the representation of extemporaneous composition---by Ossian's personal disqualifications---and, by the want of adequate means for the preservation of such poems. Recapitulation of particulars, concluding with a general acknowledgment, that certain Galic poems were collected by Mr. Macpherson.

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THE  
CLAIMS OF OSSIAN.

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THE present Essay has, in its subject, a retrospect to the year 1761, a new æra in Celtic poetry, when Mr. Macpherson surprised the learned world with the first publication of his *Fingal*, a regular Epic poem, in six books. This extraordinary work was announced as a literal translation from the Galic of *Ossian*, a Royal Caledonian Bard, who flourished in the third century of the Christian æra, and lived to the commencement of the fourth. At a moderate interval, *Fingal* was followed by a considerable collection of other poems, *literally translated* from the same author. These pieces would have done credit to a writer of any age or country. The history of their original production, and the novelty of their style, attracted curiosity, whilst their intrinsic merit secured to them a favourable reception from the public. Immediately after the appearance of these works of *Ossian*, the antiquaries of Caledonia, unknown before, and silent

as the Bard who had celebrated their illustrious ancestors, began to assume a commanding tone. Ossian enjoyed his fame ; but his friends were not satisfied in contemplating their favourite Bard, who was now gliding down the stream of renown, at the head of his peaceful brethren of Ireland and Wales : the stream must be wholly consecrated to the bark of Selma.\*

What provocation the Irish had given, any farther than a single advertisement in a newspaper,† and that without signature, I have not been able to learn ; but throughout the notes and dissertations, with which Mr. Macpherson illustrated his publications, he has attacked them with no small degree of apparent resentment. As for the Welsh, notwithstanding their proverbial irascibility of temper, they received the new claimant of fame, with the utmost complacency and good humour, and with a humility which, it might have been expected, would have blunted the edge of jealousy.---Was Ossian excellent ? They boasted of nothing that could rival his merit.—Was he as old as the third century ?—They could produce nothing of a date earlier than the fifth or sixth.—From this period, they had treasured up some relics of their ancestors, such as they

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\* Ossian's Palace, in the Western Highlands.

† In Faulkener's Dublin Journal, 1st Dec. 1761, Mr. Macpherson says, this was *two weeks* before his first publication appeared in London.---Diss. on the Poems of Ossian.

were. These they cherished as family curiosities; but they *admired Ossian*.

The Welsh Bards, however, obscure and rustic as they are acknowledged to be, approached too near the throne of the Royal Caledonian. Mr. Macpherson pushes them off with a contemptuous remark, that he could soon read them and translate, if they had any thing worth translating. Nor were these Bards sufficiently humbled by such a repulse. Their very existence gave offence to the friends of Ossian, and to his enemies. They had unfortunately written in *rhyme*. A critic who had taken upon him the conducting of literary opinion, discovers that rhyme was unknown in Europe, till some centuries after the age of Taliesin: and, by extorting a new meaning from an old passage in Giraldus Cambrensis, the same Aristarchus produces a direct proof, that rhyme was not generally used by the ancient Welsh Bards.\*

Upon this perverted authority, a grave historian of North Britain, but no friend of Ossian, pronounces our supposed ancient poems to be modern forgeries.†

Thus the old Cambro-British Bards are attacked, not only by the friends, but also by the adversaries

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\* See this subject ably discussed, the practice of the Bards defended, and Giraldus reconciled to their cause, in Mr. Turner's *Vindication*, p. 250, &c.

† "In Welsh poetry, it (rhyme) was unknown to Giraldus Cambrensis, in the twelfth Century, a sufficient proof that the rhymes of Taliesin, and the Welsh Bards, are a modern forgery."---Mr. Laing's *Diss. on Ossian's Poems*, annexed to his *Hist.* v. ii. p. 436.

of Ossian, who muster pretty strongly in the field of letters. The former party find them trivial, upon comparison; and the latter, regarding Ossian as an arrant impostor, reject the Cambrian poems unexamined, concluding that they stand exactly upon the same footing.

The question of the *genuineness* of the ancient British rhymes, I shall entirely trust to the *Vindication* of the learned and ingenious author of the *Anglo-Saxon History*: and, had the matter rested in a mere debate of competition, I should not have meddled in it at all. It is a subject of little importance to the literary world, whether the Celt of Caledonia, of Ireland, or of Wales, can exhibit the best and the oldest national poems. But Ossian is elevated into the rank of an authentic historian, the first that exists, amongst the natives of the British Islands, and even, of the north of Europe. By his sole aid Mr. Macpherson overturns the long established account of the colonization of Britain and Ireland. He ascertains a multitude of Caledonian victories, in Scandinavia, and Denmark, during the second and third centuries, and of Scandinavian descents upon the Islands of Britain, in the same early ages. The incidents of Ossian, according to this writer's decision, are authentic and historical—his descriptions paint the genuine manners and customs of the ancient inhabitants of these kingdoms, and his Muse, at this day, pronounces their uncorrupted language. In short, Ossian is authen-

tic throughout ; and, consequently, all that differs from him is debased, erroneous, and spurious.\* Nor have these ideas been propagated by the editor of Ossian alone. For upwards of forty years, they have obtruded themselves upon our notice, in numberless histories, dissertations, philosophical essays, sketches, reviews, magazines, &c. &c.

Before an author, who has but just emerged from obscurity, be admitted as sole evidence, in matters of historical moment ; before he be allowed to substantiate facts, in the face of better known documents ; it is but fair that his character should be examined, and his credentials duly appreciated. The province which Ossian has assumed, renders him, therefore, an object of sufficient importance to justify the publication of a short essay, for the purpose of elucidating his real pretensions. This subject might have been committed to more able hands ; but the attention I have bestowed upon kindred topics, may, in some measure, have qualified me for the task, which it has been my aim to execute fairly.

In the pursuit of this enquiry, candour demands that we should, first of all, consider the editor's statement of his authorities for the originals of Ossian, and of the part which he himself supported, in producing this work to the public. Mr. Mac-

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\* See Mr. Macpherson's notes at large, and his Dissertation upon the Poems of Ossian.

pherson had a favourable opportunity to offer something satisfactory upon this head. His Fingal first appeared about the close of the year 1761; and in 1773, he published a revised edition of the poems, notes, and dissertations; put a finishing hand to them, and resigned them for ever to their fate. So novel had the works of the Caledonian Ossian appeared to the public, and so different from what might have been expected from a Celtic Bard of the third or fourth century, that, during the intervening eleven years, many doubts had been suggested, as to their genuineness. Some writer of great eminence maintained, that they were the original compositions of Mr. Macpherson himself, whilst others supposed them to be imitations of ancient Irish poems.

In this *final* edition, it might have been expected, that Mr. Macpherson would have resolved these doubts, and overruled these suggestions, by giving some satisfactory and particular account of his originals, whether found in writing, or collected from oral traditions; and, by producing a few specimens of the genuine composition of his author. He might have regarded the objection of his adversaries as useful hints to fortify the weaker parts of his national cause. He did not avail himself of this opportunity. On the contrary, he has here dropped some hints of his own, which must have had a direct tendency to confirm the scepticism of the public. In his short preface, he styles himself, indifferently,

the *author*, the *writer*, and the *translator*. “With-  
 “out encreasing his *genius*, the *author* may have  
 “improved his language in the eleven years that  
 “the following poems have been in the hands of the  
 “public. Errors in diction might have been com-  
 “mitted at twenty-four, which the experience of  
 “a riper age may remove; and some *exuberances*  
 “in *imagery* may be restrained with advantage, by  
 “a degree of judgment, acquired in the progress of  
 “time.”

Is not this the language of a man who speaks of his own original compositions? Such passages more than half admit the truth of the opinion, which pronounces Mr. Macpherson the real author of the poems in question. And what are we to understand by the *exuberances* in *imagery* which a *literal prose translator* had to *restrain*? The imagery ought to be, precisely, that of his author. The *literal* translator could have had no choice. He was bound to follow his original. But if the translator of Ossian, in his *first* edition, assumed a liberty which did not belong to him, what security has he given for his fidelity in the *second*? In his dissertation upon Ossian, Mr. Macpherson remarks,—“Since the publication of these poems, many insinuations have  
 “been made, and doubts, concerning their authenticity. Whether these suspicions are suggested by  
 “prejudice, or are only the effects of malice, I neither  
 “know nor care. Those who have doubted my  
 “veracity have paid a compliment to my genius;



“ and were even the allegation true, my self-denial  
“ might have atoned for my fault. Without vanity,  
“ I say it, I think I could write tolerable poetry ; and  
“ I assure my antagonists that I would not *translate*  
“ what I could not *imitate*.”

In this passage, the author seems to feel something of the proud disdain of wounded honour. A gentleman's veracity ought not, certainly, to be doubted, with perfect impunity, by his friend or his equal. But the case is not precisely the same between an author and the public; especially upon a subject that is not wholly personal. Custom, at least, has established a difference. Else, why do the most respectable historians deform their pages, with so many unsightly quotations and authorities? The public knows nothing of the man but as an author: it has often been imposed upon, and has, therefore, a right to be sceptical.

If, then, I may be allowed to contemplate Mr. Macpherson, merely in the light of an author, he seems, in this very passage, to balance the reputation of superior genius, against that of scrupulous veracity, and even to throw a dead weight into the scale of invention. Might it not fairly be collected from such periods, that he intended to represent himself as the translator of some parts of these poems, and as the imitative author of other parts? And if this be the apparent intention of the paragraph before us, it were in vain to look further for any thing to remove the impression. He says nothing more in



his own vindication. He adds not a syllable relative to the copies, or the reciters, of any one of his originals; nor does he produce a single line of those originals.

In guarding myself against the charge of illiberality, I must add this further remark.—The question, respecting the genuineness of the Poems of Ossian, does not resolve itself simply into the degree of credit which we impute to Mr. Macpherson's assertion: it takes in the accuracy of his information, and the due decision of his judgment. His veracity can only be responsible for the facts—that he did not invent these poems—that he found them in the Galic language, already composed, and ascribed to Ossian.

Let us give our author full credit for candour and ingenuousness in this publication; let us suppose that the Galic poems came into his hands, precisely, in the form in which he offers them to the public, and with the strongest attestation of national tradition in their favour. Yet, admitting all this, he cannot refuse to his readers the right of examining the internal evidence of their authenticity, and the external circumstances, by which that evidence is either confirmed or shaken. We must still retain the privilege of determining in our own minds, and, upon just grounds, whether these poems are, in reality, what they purport to be; namely, the genuine productions of a Bard of the third century, describing the real actions of his own family, in

which he himself was a witness and a party; or whether they be the fabrication of more recent ages, in which the name of Ossian is only *dramatically* introduced. Having exercised this right, with studied impartiality, I must confess, there are some material circumstances, which induce me to refuse my assent to the editor's proposition.

The first objection, that forcibly presents itself upon the face of the work, is the glaring appearance of anachronism; or the incongruity of the events related with the age in which they are placed, or with any one historical age whatsoever. In the poem of *Comala*, Fingal, the father of Ossian, takes the field against *Caracul*, the son of the king of the world. In the dissertation which *ascertains* the æra of Ossian, Mr. Macpherson asserts, that this *Caracul* was no other than *Caracalla*, the son of the emperor *Severus*: and he dates the action in A. D. 211. According to this, Fingal was a warrior in the former part of the third century.

But, upon the general face of these poems, it fully appears, that the great exploits of the same Fingal belong to those ages, in which the Caledonians of Britain and the Isles, and the inhabitants of Ireland, were struggling for independence, with the men of Lochlin; that is, the Danes and Norwegians.

Nor can we place our hero in the beginning of this period of Northern incroachment, for we learn from the sixth book of the Fingal, that a military

intercourse, between the Caledonians and Scandinavians, had subsisted in the days of his great grandfather, *Trenmor*, who married a princess of Scandinavia.

History places the commencement of this intercourse and political struggle, about the conclusion of the eighth, or beginning of the ninth century. The author of the Northern Antiquities observes upon this subject,\*—“ Britain and Gaul were too distant, and too well defended, to become the first attempts of the Scandinavian ravages:” and he dates the commencement of their maritime expeditions into these countries, towards the beginning of the ninth century. But have the Celtic nations any obscure accounts of earlier adventures of these pirates, which are unnoticed in general history? Let us inquire of the Irish and Welsh, who, at least, stand upon a level with the Caledonians, for the preservation of ancient records.

The learned and patriotic Miss Brooke thus answers for the Irish.—“ According to the accounts “ that *Irish* history gives of Danish invasions, in “ this kingdom, *the earliest* was about the end of “ the eighth century: we, therefore, cannot safely “ rest upon the credit of our Bards, who tell us of “ numberless descents which that fierce and warlike “ people made upon our coasts, wherein they were “ opposed and beaten back, by kings and heroes,

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\* Vol. i. chap. 10.

“who flourished in the earliest ages of christianity.”\*

*Caradoc of Llancarvan*, the respectable annalist of the Welsh, writes to the same effect.—“In the year 795, the pagan Danes came, the *first* time, to the Island of Britain, and committed great ravages in England. They afterwards proceeded to Glamorgan, which they wasted with fire and sword. At last, the Welsh got the better of them, and having slain multitudes, compelled the survivors to return to sea. From thence they went into Ireland, and destroyed *Racrey*n and other places.”† Hence we find that the annals of the Celtic tribes agree with those of other nations, and consequently, that the visits of the Danes and Norwegians to the British Islands in the second and third centuries, as reported by Ossian, are events, not only unsupported by history, but evidently contradictory to its authority.

I may remark the same inconsistency with history, in those Irish poems and romances, in which the character of Ossian is introduced. Oscar, the son of the Bard, falls at the Battle of *Gabhra*, A. D. 296, whilst Fingal was absent, upon a Roman

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\* *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, p. 35. Of the Bards here alluded to, Ossian was the most noted: for the reader ought to be aware, that the Irish lay claim to this Bard, and to the heroes whom he celebrates. The credit due to the poems which go under his name, may be collected from future extracts.

† *Myvyrian Archaeology of Wales*, v. ii. p. 471.

expedition.\* Yet the same Fingal, and his sons, and his grandson, are repeatedly brought into the field, to oppose the invading Danes, and even to humble Magnus the Great, king of Norway, in the very close of the eleventh century.

As another series of events which present themselves, in every part of these poems, we may discriminate the frequent expeditions of Fingal, as well as of his ancestors and descendants, into the Islands of Scandinavia. These expeditions had, frequently, nothing more important in their object, than a hunting excursion, like that which is celebrated in *Chevy Chase* ; but they constantly ended in a conflict with the king of Lochlin, and a victory of the Caledonians.

History does not record such Caledonian victories in any age ; and it is utterly improbable that they should have been achieved, in that very age, when the Scandinavians, according to Ossian, were taking possession of the Scottish Isles, and when the inhabitants of Caledonia and Ireland were unable to protect their own coasts, from Northern insult. Nor can it be conceived that, in these tumultuous times, a party which had set sail, upon a friendly visit, to the king of one of the Orkney Islands, and was driven by a storm into Scandinavia, should be competent to oppose and vanquish the *high king*

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\* Reliques of Irish Poetry, p. 146, 147, 155.

of Lochlin, in the field of battle. The relation of such events is fabulous in its very aspect.

The plain inference is, that these events could not have been recorded by Ossian, as the familiar occurrences of his own times, and consequently that the poems which report them, in his name, are undoubtedly spurious. It will be asked—Whence could such fables have originated? I can only conjecture, that some of the *professed talemakers* of the *fourteenth* or *fifteenth* century, had caught a vague tradition of certain expeditions into the Islands of Lochlin; that is, if properly understood, those Scottish Islands which the Lochlinians had occupied in the *ninth*. Upon this rumour they founded their tales: and, in order to give them due weight and dignity, put them into the mouth of *Ossian*, the son of *Fionn*, a hero of the mythological ages. The genius of Romance, emboldened by an ignorance of history and geography, carried the Bard and his heroes, from the *Western* shore of Scotland—not to an island that was at the distance of two bowshots, but—over the Northern Ocean, to kill a boar, to rescue a distressed damsel, or vanquish a mighty king, on the mountains of Scandinavia.

The general subjects of these poems are, therefore, either not synchronous with the supposed æra of Ossian; or else wholly unfounded in history and real fact. And this is an objection that can never be overcome, unless the Caledonians can prove, that the credit of their Bard, unsupported by other

evidence, and, in the face of probability, is sufficient to substantiate the fact, that the kings of Lochlin invaded the British Islands, and, at the same time, to carry the Caledonian conquerors into the forests of Scandinavia.

But before he be admitted to this privilege, it will be proper to inquire, whether the costume of his warriors, and the general picture of the times which he delineates, be congruous with the history of the age in which he is placed. And here, instead of authenticating his credentials, he seems to be only extending the line of responsibility.

In the descriptions of these poems, and in Mr. Macpherson's notes, the arms and habits of the Irish and Caledonians are represented as having been precisely the same in the days of Ossian. Thus far, the Bard and his editor are probably accurate. But it is remarkable that, in the delineation of those arms and habits, the romantic Bards of Ireland accord with the general tablet of history much better than the celebrated *Homer* of the North. The appearance of the host of Lochlin is thus described in *Magnus the Great*, an Irish poem, published by Miss Brooke :

“ At length we see grey morning rise,

“ Upon its early dew ;

“ And the first dawn of eastern skies

“ Gives Lochlin's host to view.

“ Before us, on the crowded shore,

“ Their gloomy standard rose,

“ And many a chief their army bore,

“ And many princely foes.



“ And many a *proul* and *bossy shield*,  
 “ And *coat of martial mail*,  
 “ And warlike arms of *proof* they wield,  
 “ To *guard* or to *assail*.” \*

This passage gives occasion to the following remarks by the translator.—“ We see here a marked  
 “ difference between the arms and appearance of  
 “ either host. The troops of Magnus are covered  
 “ with *steel*; but we meet with no *coats of mail*  
 “ amongst the chiefs of the Fenii.” And again,—“ It  
 “ should seem, that body armour, of any kind, was  
 “ unknown to the ancient Irish, previous to the *tenth*  
 “ century. Though the poets of the *middle* ages  
 “ describe the heroes of *Ossian* as shining in polished  
 “ steel, no relic of that kind of armour has escaped  
 “ the wreck of time in Ireland. I confess myself  
 “ inclined to think, that their inflexible attachment  
 “ to their civil dress, would not yield to the fashion  
 “ of the martial garb of their enemies. It is certain  
 “ that the English did not find them cased in  
 “ armour.” †

But the heroes of the Caledonian Ossian are defended with iron shields. “ The mail rattles on  
 “ their breast, and pours its *lightning* from every  
 “ side.” The shield of Cathmor, an Irish king, is fabricated with an art not inferior to that displayed in the shield of Hercules, Achilles, or Æneas. These seven constellations are portrayed in their

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\* Reliques of Irish Poetry, p. 54.

† Hist. Essay on the dress and armour of the Irish, p. 106.



distinct and appropriate characters. It had also some peculiar qualities, which no other shield of ancient or modern times could boast of. “Seven bosses rose on the shield; the *seven voices* of the king, which his warriors received from the wind, and marked in all their tribes.”\*

Cuthullin rides in a car, the sides of which are embossed with stones, and sparkle, like the sea, round the boat of night. Hard polished bits shine in a wreath of foam—thin thongs, bright studded with gems, bend on the stately necks of the steeds.†

The Orkney Islands are adorned with cities, encompassed with ancient mossy walls:‡ and—“several ancient poems mention wax-lights and wine, as common in the halls of Fingal.”§

All this is so different from what we should have conceived of the Caledonians and Irish of the third century, and so little supported by collateral evidence, that, instead of establishing the authenticity of the poems, it impresses them with the glaring stamp of more recent fiction.

Let us, however, approach somewhat nearer to the heroes of Ossian, and contemplate them, in their general characters, manners, and sentiments.

\* Temora, B. vii.

† Fingal, B. i.

‡ Carrié Thura.

§ Fingal, B. vi. *Note*.---The Ossian of Ireland, like the Caledonian Bard, introduces wax-lights.---*Reliques of Irish Poetry*, p. 51. These are supposed to have been procured from the plunder of the Roman Provinces.---It is more probable they came from the *Roman Catholics*.

“ Here indeed, says Dr. Blair, in the character and  
“ description of Fingal, Ossian triumphs almost  
“ unrivalled : for we may boldly defy all antiquity  
“ to shew us any hero equal to Fingal.”\* All this  
must be acknowledged, as far as it regards *classical*  
antiquity ; for Fingal is adorned with every good  
quality which imagination could suggest, excepting  
piety, and unsullied by any of the common frailties  
of human nature. Yet, the painting of the Caledonian Bard is not so absolutely unique as this elegant writer seems to suppose. The same amiable and Utopian picture of Fingal, presents itself in the romantic poems of the Irish.† I extract the following personal description of this celebrated hero, from the *Rhapsody of Oisín* : “ Finn of the  
“ large and liberal soul of bounty ; exceeding all  
“ his countrymen, in the prowess and accomplish-  
“ ments of a warrior, king of mild majesty, and  
“ numerous bands. The ever-open house of kindness was his heart ; the seat of undaunted courage.  
“ Great was the chief of the mighty Fenii. Finn of  
“ the perfect soul ; the consummate wisdom ; whose  
“ knowledge penetrated events, and pierced through  
“ the veil of futurity. Finn of the splendid and  
“ ever-during glories. Bright were his blue-rolling  
“ eyes, and his hair, like flowing gold ! Lovely

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\* Dr. Blair's Critical Dissertation, generally annexed to Macpherson's Ossian.

† See Reliques of Irish Poetry, 53, 91, 99.

“ were the charms of his unaltered beauty, and his cheeks like the glowing rose.”\*

The characters of Oscar, Fillan, Cuthullin, &c. though skilfully diversified, are equally well drawn and well supported. But they do not appear to have been immediately drawn from real life. They are not like those characters which are found in history, or those mortals whom we have known and conversed with. They are the ideal sketches of a man who contemplates human nature, *as it ought to be*; not the faithful touches of him, who observes it, *as it is*. They resemble those sublime figures, which the imagination has often delineated, on the canvass of poetry and romance—Beings whom we know only by ancient renown, and whose little defects have vanished in the distance of time.

The manners and customs, which we observe in the society of these heroes, are equally romantic. But as even romance condescends to borrow some of her outlines from nature and history; and, as the scene of Ossian's poems is placed in the middle of the Northern invasions; his sketches, as far as they can be verified by history, exhibit the *Gothic*, rather than the Celtic style. Of this I shall give a few instances. In all the wars of Fingal, we find a multitude of Bards in the field, animating the prowess of the warriors. Fingal has his “ thousand Bards” at a

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\* Reliques of Irish Poetry, p. 133.

time when his army seems to have consisted of a few hundreds only. The Celtic Bards belonged to the establishment of the Druids, who are recorded to have generally kept aloof from the field of battle: and although my acquaintance with the Welsh Bards is pretty extensive, I cannot recollect a single instance of the harp having been produced in that field. But the Gothic *Scalds* were employed to compose odes or songs, which related to the most shining exploits of their heroes. These they chaunted before the army, to animate the bloody onset. The praises which these poets gave to valour, the warlike enthusiasm which animated their verses, the great care men took to learn them from their infancy, being all of them the mutual effects of the ruling passion of this people, served, in their turn, to strengthen and extend it.\* Hacon, earl of Norway, had five celebrated poets along with him, *in that famous battle*, in which the warriors of Jomsbourg were defeated; and history records, that *they sung, each, an ode, to animate the soldiers, before they engaged*.†

The heroes of Irish romance also took multitudes of Bards with them into the field. These geniuses are represented as “ glowing with the joint enthusiasm of the poet and the warrior; as frequently “ rushing amidst the ranks, following their chief,

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\* Northern Antiq. v. i. p. 223.

† Mons. Mallet, from Bartholin. p. 172.

“ through all the fury of the fight, and continuing  
 “ to the last, those sublime and elevating strains,  
 “ which inspired by the sight of heroic valour, and  
 “ called forth by, and suited to the instant occasion,  
 “ wrought up courage to a pitch of frenzy, and  
 “ taught the warrior to triumph, even in the pangs  
 “ of death.”\* But the first hint of this horribly-  
 grotesque combination of martial and poetic frenzy,  
 seems evidently to have been borrowed from the  
 Gothic nations.

As a second instance of the imitation of Gothic manners, I remark that Ossian’s heroes disdain to engage the enemy by night, or to bring superior forces into the field, concluding that glory was to be acquired only in the *equal combat*; and that the leaders of the expedition frequently decide the dispute by single combat. Irish romance draws the same picture, in strong lines, and upon a Colossal scale. “ What added lustre to the native  
 “ valour was, the extreme openness, candour, and  
 “ simplicity of this people (the Irish) not even to  
 “ gratify that insatiate thirst for power, the source  
 “ of such devastations, do we often read of indirect  
 “ or dishonourable means used. If any unforeseen  
 “ accident disappointed either party, as to the  
 “ number of troops, &c. notice was sent to his  
 “ opponent, and a further day was appointed, and  
 “ generally granted.”† “ The heroes of ancient

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\* Reliques of Irish Poetry, p. 139.

† O Hall, Int. to the Hist. and Antiq. of Ireland, p. 223.

“ Ireland were *sworn* never to attack an enemy, at  
“ any disadvantage.”\* It should appear, by ancient  
British history, that this oath was considered as  
binding only upon *Irish ground*. Be that as it  
may, all this is derived, by the Bards of Ireland and  
Scotland, from the manners of the old Danes and  
Norwegians. “ By a singular strain of generosity,  
“ which the love of glory was able to produce, in  
“ minds, in other respects, so ferocious, if the  
“ enemy that fell in their way had fewer ships than  
“ themselves, they set aside part of their own  
“ vessels, that so, engaging upon *equal terms*, the  
“ victory might not be attributed to superiority of  
“ numbers. Many of them also regarded it as  
“ *dishonourable to surprise the enemy by night*.  
“ Sometimes the chiefs thought it best to decide  
“ the dispute by single combat.”†

These are precisely the manners of Ossian's  
heroes ; but in historical truth, they were, probably,  
peculiar to the Gothic nations. Nothing of the kind  
appears amongst those ancient Irish and Caledonian  
warriors who were known to the Romans and  
Southern Britons.

Mr. Macpherson admits a perfect similarity of  
manners between the Caledonians and Britons to  
have subsisted, in the days of Ossian, and adduces  
this circumstance as an undoubted proof that they

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\* Reliques of Irish Poetry, p. 75, from O Hall.

† Northern Antiq. v. i. p. 255.

were originally the same people.\* This being granted, I know no reason why the Britons, of the fifth or sixth century, should have been totally different from the Caledonians of the third. Yet, amongst these, we discover no traces of the cool, deliberate courage, or the clemency and generosity of Ossian's heroes. All was fury, passion, and cruelty. *Aneurin's* heroes, having captivated and beheaded their formidable enemy, invite the ravens to pick his skull. Taliesin celebrates his favourite chief, Urien of Reged, for setting fire to houses *before day*. But, in order to bring the medium of comparison as near as may be, to the country and the alledged age of Ossian, I shall present my readers with an Elegy composed by an *older Taliesin*,† on the death of *Cunedda*, the son of *Edeyrn*, a Cambrian Prince, which happened, according to Owen's Cambrian Biography, in the year 389. Whether this date be accurate or not, Cunedda is an historical character. Nennius calls him *Atavus*, the *great grandfather* of Maelgwn, who began to reign in Venedotia, or North Wales, A. D. 517, and gives the following account of his exploits:—

Filii autem Vethan (Scoti) obtinuerunt regnum Dimectorum, ubi civitas est quæ vocatur Mineu (St. David's) et in aliis regionibus se dilataverunt,

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\* Note on Colnadena.

† *Taliesin*, "Radiant front," or "Illuminated head," seems to have been the Epithet or Title of several ancient British Bards.



i. e. Guiher Cet Gueſy, donec expulſi ſunt a *Cunedá*, et a filiis ejus, ab omnibus regionibus Britannicis.\* And again,—Mailcuinus, magnus rex apud Britones, regebat, id eſt, in regione Guenedotiæ, quia *Atarus* illius *Cunedag*, cum filiis ſuis—Scotos cum ingentiſſimâ clade expulerat, ab illis regionibus, et nunquam reverſi fuerunt iterum ad habitandum.†

This elegy is of difficult conſtruction, and contains ſeveral words which are not to be found elſewhere; but the meaning, as clearly as I can render it, is as follows:—

“ I, who am Talieſin, a man of the oaks, award  
 “ the ſong of praiſe to the Baptized, the Chriſtian  
 “ chief, the worſhipper of the wonderful one. Where  
 “ cliff and cliff meet, in the Weſt, was the dread of  
 “ Cunedda, the ardent in battle, in Caer Wair and  
 “ Caer Liwelydd. The vibrating ſhock was given.  
 “ The conflict aroſe, like the full burſting of fire  
 “ through a broken wall; when he urged his courſe  
 “ through the land of the Elgovæ, like the wind  
 “ ſighing againſt aſhen ſpears. His contact, I  
 “ know, would produce a chill, in the miſt of  
 “ æſtival heat. But ſkilful Bards, dreſt in the habit  
 “ of their order, could preſerve, with the token, his  
 “ entire friendſhip.

“ The lamented death of Cunedda I deplore. He  
 “ is bewailed by Tewdwr,‡ as a dauntleſs hero, who  
 “ equally cruſhed the profound and the ſhallow.

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\* Cap. viii.

† Cap. lxiv.

‡ Perhaps *Tewdwr*, *Theodoſius*, in whoſe time our hero lived.



“ His deep stroke brought them to a level. He  
 “ frustrated the proud beast of Caledlwm;\* to his  
 “ foe he was harder than a bone.

“ Exalted was Cunedda, chief of the *natives* and  
 “ of the land. His honour was supported on a  
 “ hundred occasions, before his death arrived, and  
 “ the hurdle of the slain was borne, by the youths  
 “ of Bernicia, in the field of battle.

“ For the dread of him the song of woe was  
 “ chaunted, before the portion of earth became his  
 “ covering. His *swarm* were like swift dogs round  
 “ a thicket: *they carried no scabbards*—the device  
 “ of cowardice.

“ The destiny of the annihilating sleep I deplore.  
 “ I mourn for the hall, for the garment of Cunedda;  
 “ for the protector of the briny wave; for the spear,  
 “ in which the sea confided. As for the Bards who  
 “ hesitate, I despise them: with Bards of active  
 “ energy, in the song of praise, will I contend; and  
 “ the others will I estimate by the bundle.

“ He was wonderful in the field, with his nine hun-  
 “ dred horse.† Before the *communion* of Cunedda,‡  
 “ I might, by a single nod, obtain milch cows in the  
 “ summer; I might have steeds in the winter; I

\* *Caled-lwm*, a hard, bony man: the next clause contains a pun upon his name.

† This was precisely the force assigned to that officer under the Roman Government, who was styled *Dux Britannie*.---See Camden's Introd.

‡ Does this mean---*Before he became a Christian?*

“ might enjoy sparkling wine, and oil ;\* I might  
 “ possess a troop of captives. He—the unrelenting  
 “ consumer (Death) proceeds from his secret place—  
 “ the beholder—the chief with the lion’s visage,  
 “ whose subjects are ashes :† he stands before the  
 “ son of Edeyrn, who, previous to the reign of terrors,  
 “ was fierce, undaunted, unrestrained—he is now  
 “ compassed with the streams of death.

“ He had lifted his shield at the post of honour.  
 “ True and valiant were his chiefs—men to be de-  
 “ sired—equally tall—of comely aspect, and just in  
 “ their movements—the race of a Colonial city.”

Here we perceive the barbaric Muse in all her native asperity—at this moment freely soaring aloft, and presently again, awkwardly creeping on the ground. But where is the method, where the polish, the refined sentiment, the unbending majesty of Ossian? They are all the effect of an enlarged education, the property of a more cultivated age. Where are his deliberate, persevering, and generously-romantic heroes? They are not to be found in ancient Britain. They are mere figures of romance, sketched after the Northern adventurers; but painted with softened features.

The author of the *Northern Antiquities* has drawn the character of a Celtic warrior, as diametrically opposite to that of Fingal and his worthies, as it is exactly congruous with the representations which

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\* These particulars mark the time of the Roman Government.

† Alluding to the Roman custom of burning the dead.

we observe in the old Welsh Bards. And the learned and judicious translator very justly remarks, that this character is suitable to the real Celtæ, as distinguished from the Gothic nations.

The author's words are these:—"The Greek and Latin historians represent them to us as madmen, who, in battle, only followed the instinct of a blind and brutal rage, without regarding either time, or place, or circumstances. At the first sight of an enemy, they darted down upon them, with the rapidity of lightning.---But they marched, we are also told, without any order, and often, without even considering whether the enemy could be forced in their post or not. Hence it frequently happened that, their vigour being exhausted, it was sufficient to resist the first shock, and they were defeated."\*

And this is the translator's note,—“What he says below, of their blind fury, of their disorderly way of fighting, and being readily broken, after the first shock, was true of the Gauls, &c. Whereas the nations of *Teutonic race*, as they had less vivacity, and were less choleric, so they seem to have had more constancy and perseverance.”

Hence it appears that the manners, and therefore the *actions* of Fingal and his heroes, were delineated, not only after the men of Lochlin had

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\* Northern Antiq. v. i. p. 236.

rendered themselves familiar to the Caledonians and Irish ; but in an age when their general character was confounded with that of the natives, and regarded as containing the essentials of true heroism.

Objections to the claim of high antiquity, similar to those I have remarked in the Caledonian Bard, present themselves in the Irish poems, which bear the name of Ossian, together with some faults which are peculiar to the latter. But we find the more judicious of the Irish antiquaries ready to make the necessary allowance. They do not pertinaciously maintain, that they are the genuine works of Ossian, but view them as the productions of some more recent and unknown Bards, who composed in his name. Thus Ossian is introduced in *Magnus the Great*, as the *reporter of the tale* ; but Miss Brooke observes in her introduction—"The language of the following poem, as it now stands, is certainly too modern to be ascribed to an earlier period than the middle ages. According to the accounts that Irish history gives of Danish invasions in this kingdom, the earliest was about the end of the eighth century : we, therefore, cannot safely rest upon the credit of our Bards, who tell us of numberless descents which that fierce and warlike people made,—in the earliest ages of Christianity. The author of this piece is said to have belonged to the family of *O'Neils*, but what his name was, I

“ have not been able to learn.”\* Again, in the introduction to *The Chase*—“ Nor can we give it, “ at least, in its present dress, either to *Oisín*, or “ to any other poet, of the age in which he lived. “ The marks of a classical hand appear, frequently, “ throughout the whole—I fear we should risk an “ error, in ascribing it to any period earlier than “ the middle ages.”†—“ There are numberless Irish “ poems still extant, attributed to *Oisín*—in all of “ them, the antiquary discovers traces of a later “ period.”‡ Once more—“ In all these poems, “ the *character* of *Oisín* is so admirably well sup- “ ported, that we lose the idea of any other Bard, “ and are, *for a time*, persuaded it is *Oisín* himself “ that speaks—we do not seem to read a narration “ of events, wherein *the writer was neither a wit- “ ness nor a party.*”§

The uniform dignity of sentiment, and inviolate generosity of conduct, which distinguished the heroes of Macpherson’s *Ossian*, appear also in the romantic poems of the Irish. They are exemplified in almost every page of the collection published by Miss Brooke, and thus briefly characterized in that lady’s preface—“ The productions of our Irish “ Bards exhibit a glow of cultivated genius—a “ spirit of elevated heroism—sentiments of pure “ honour—instances of disinterested patriotism—

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\* Reliques of Irish Poetry, p. 35, 36.

† Ibid. p. 70.

‡ Ibid. p. 73.

§ Ibid. p. 76, &c.

“and manners, of a degree of refinement, totally  
“astonishing, at a period when the rest of Europe  
“was nearly sunk in barbarism.” But here the fair patriot gives her *recent* Bards too much credit for a faithful delineation of the ages in which they thought proper to place their heroes. Whatever the actual state of society may have been, in Ireland or in Italy, the manners delineated in the romances of the fifteenth century, allowance being made for a few local peculiarities, were very similar, all over Europe. In historical truth, however, the manners and sentiments which present themselves in the poems of Ossian, were not fully appropriate, either to the Celts or the Goths. The painting is far above nature, and can by no means be considered as verified, in the age and country in which Ossian is supposed to have lived. Indeed, under the circumstances in which his heroes are placed, such mental refinement could not have been appropriate to mortals. Scarcely has it graced the contemplative philosopher of the most enlightened age, and under the most favourable circumstances.

The poet, therefore, has not sketched his sentiments from nature, and observations of the scenes which passed before him; but from a contemplative imagination---from the tablet of romance, or the prevailing taste of his age. He has not informed our judgments, with the colouring of history, but amused our fancy with that of poetry. It follows that the work cannot be ascribed to Ossian, the



son of Fingal, a Caledonian Bard of the third century. For though we are not to refuse the free exercise of the imagination to a Caledonian, any more than to a Grecian poet; yet we must always distinguish between the man who describes the transactions and the manners which have passed under his own eye, and the Bard who derives his subject from ancient fame. Ossian, as an individual, must have felt peculiar restraints; must have been continually recalled, from the indulgence of imagination, to the relation of sober truth. A poet who snatches his subject from the wings of ancient fame, may freely indulge his fancy, in the embellishment of that subject. An old tale may give currency to a thousand improbabilities; but Ossian was describing his own contemporaries, and scenes which his own eye had surveyed. He was reciting his poems to those who had personally known *Fingal* and *Oscar* and *Cuthullin*, and who were, therefore, qualified to judge critically of the truth of his description. Under these circumstances, he must have felt the necessity, not only of observing nature and fact, in his events, characters, manners and sentiments, but also, of abstaining from violent hyperbole, and palpable fiction, upon pain of being despised as a doting fabulist.

But we can hardly open these poems, without casting our eyes upon the most glaring fictions, and such as must have presented themselves, in this light, to the audience of Ossian, had he been

the reporter of the tales. Thus, in *Carrie Thura*, the *rude stone* which represented Loda, or Odin, is converted into the *spirit of Loda*. This spirit not only comes forth, armed in all his terrors, but makes a speech of considerable length---“Dost thou force me from my place?” replied the hollow voice---“The people bend before me. I turn the battle in the field of the brave,” &c. Loda or *Odin* must have, undoubtedly, spoken in a Gothic dialect, and Fingal must have conversed with him in the same: but, to the chief of Selma, this was a trifling accomplishment. Ossian’s heroes, in general, could hold private conferences, with the Scandinavians, with the South Britons, and with the Belgæ of Ireland; or else, the Bard’s authenticity is blown into the air. How captious is this objection! replies the critic---Did not Priam converse with Achilles, and Æneas with Dido, and with the princes of Italy? True---Homer and Virgil give us such representations; but the stories of Achilles and Æneas were ancient, when they came into their hands. I am not speaking of what poets may dare, in such cases: the question regards what we must receive, as matter of fact. Had Virgil attended his hero, in person, through all the adventures which he relates, it is probable we should have heard of some little embarrassment, on the subject of strange languages. But to return to our unfortunate ghost---“Fingal, advancing, drew his sword: the blade of the dark-brown Luno.



“ The gleaming path of the steel winds through the  
 “ gloomy ghost. The form fell shapeless into air.”

Our great poet, Milton, boasted of originality : but here we find him stripped of what was supposed to be one of his most original thoughts, as it certainly is one of the most absurd in his *Paradise Lost*. The very language, in which he describes the cutting up of a spirit, is borrowed from *Ossian*!! How happened it that such a plagiarism as this escaped the researches of a *Lauder*? By the conclusion of the same poem we learn that, although the gashes of Odin’s ghost, like those of Satan, soon closed, his pride was effectually humbled—  
 “ The wounds of his form were not forgot : he still  
 “ feared the hand of the king.”

In the poem of *Carthon*, we are told of a mist, rising from the lake, *in the figure of an aged man*, approaching Selma’s hall, and dissolving in a shower of blood. This sounds also like “ A tale of other times.”

In the *War of Caros*,<sup>\*</sup> Oscar, a youth who, if we may trust Mr. Macpherson, had not seen his twentieth year, stands *alone*, opposed to the disciplined army of Carausius. But he was himself a host.  
 “ He raised his terrible voice. The ROCKING hills  
 “ echoed around ; the starting roes bounded away ;  
 “ and the *trembling ghosts of the dead, fled, shriek-*  
 “ *ing on their clouds.*” What was the event of this unequal contest? Oscar, perceiving that he was to have all the glory to himself—“ Stood, growing in

“ his place, like a flood in a narrow vale ! The battle  
 “ came ; but (who fell !) *they* fell : bloody was the  
 “ sword of Oscar !” How much is it to be regretted,  
 in this age of military adventure, that Ossian was  
*the last of his race !*

But this instance of Oscar’s prowess was not singular amongst the heroes of our Bard. Calmar, when mortally wounded, proposes, singly, to withstand, in a narrow pass, the whole victorious host of the Scandinavians, till the Irish army should have made good its retreat. What less than this was to be expected from the son of a man who had cut up a thunder cloud, with his drawn sword, seizing it by the curling head, and had beat away a tempest from the face of the sky !\* Well might the popular translator exclaim, upon this occasion—  
 “ They best succeed who dare !”

How gigantic is the wrestling of Fingal and Swaran, on the side of the hill of Cromla ! “ When the  
 “ pride of their strength arose, they shook the hill with  
 “ their heels. Rocks tumble from their places on  
 “ high : the green-headed bushes are overturned.”†

The warm imagination of a poet may indulge itself in these colossal images, when describing the heroes of ancient romance ; but who has ever used such language as this, in speaking of his own father or his own son ? Who ever listened, without a smile of contempt, to a *grave* narrative, which thus de-

\* Fingal, B. iiii.

† Ib. B. v.

scribed the actions of men, whom he had personally known? The age which could tolerate extravagances of this kind, respecting its own contemporaries, never produced such a poet as the supposed Ossian, whose merit, as a Bard, I will freely acknowledge, when I shall have adduced one more criterion of his pretensions as an historian.

As we discover, in these poems, the work of imagination, in its boldest flights, so we may remark it likewise, in its usual defects. Nature is never tired in producing discriminate characters, nor Fortune, in diversifying events; but the most vigorous and active imagination has its limits. After a few energetic efforts, it is apt to languish, and its subsequent operations present us with copies, instead of originals. Agreeably to this remark, the multitude of events, related in these poems, do not display the — *Varios casus*, the *Tot discrimina rerum*, which are generally found in real life and authentic history. They rather impress the idea of numerous sketches, taken in a confined landscape, where the same object perpetually returns, in a different point of view.

If Fingal moves, we may be sure he is going forth to fight and to conquer. With whatever disadvantage this hero, or his lieutenant, takes the field, he almost invariably subdues the hostile chief, in single combat; he then either kills, or binds and pardons him, and returns to Morven, crowned with fame and glory. To the Caledonian heroes

we will allow all their merit, yet we must suppose, that they could not, in every instance, have conquered Fortune. This capricious goddess is to be kept in subjection only by the Genius of Romance, who, here, walks forth in triumph, conducting her favourite warriors in the path of renown, and infallible victory. Nor is it amongst the heroes alone that we trace the evident footsteps of this wayward Muse. We hear her pronouncing the fanciful names, relating the singular love adventures, and describing the sentimental deaths of Ossian's heroines. As an elucidation of my meaning, I shall recite the instances of this kind, which occur to my recollection, and such as I can readily turn to.

*Conban-Carglas*, the daughter of a chief of Lochlin, shrinks and expires at the sight of her lover Swaran's broken helmet.<sup>1</sup>

Two brothers, the jealous lovers of *Strinadona*, that is, *Strife of heroes*, met in the field: the one fell, the other was banished, and the lady, if I mistake not, expired with the shock.<sup>2</sup>

*Comala*, "Pleasant Brow," disguised herself in the armour of a young warrior, to follow her hero, and suddenly expired upon hearing a false rumour of his death.<sup>3</sup>

*Vinvela*, "Sweet Mouth," heard a vague report of the death of her beloved Shilric, and expired with grief.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Cath Lođa.

2. Ib.

3. Comala.

4. Carric-Thura.

*Utha* covers herself with steel armour, to attend her hero, in the disguise of a warrior, and is afterwards discovered, by accidentally dropping her helmet.<sup>5</sup>

*Crimora*, “Great Heart,” takes the arms of a warrior, to attend her hero, in private; she accidentally pierces him with an arrow, which had been aimed at his enemy, and “with grief the sad  
“mourner dies.”<sup>6</sup>

*Colnadona*, “Love of Heroes,” arms herself with shield and spear, for the purpose of exciting, by an innocent stratagem, a mutual flame in the breast of Toscar. The hero snatches away the shield, for the purpose of attacking a supposed enemy, and thus discovers the amorous Nymph.<sup>7</sup>

*Oithona*, “Maid of the Waves,” is forcibly carried *to sea*, by a libertine prince, and ruined. She privately assumes the armour of a young warrior, to assist her lover, Gaul, in revenging the outrage: and when this is done, submits to a sentimental death, as an atonement to insulted honour:—the incident of discovery is not varied.<sup>8</sup>

*Colmal*, “Small Eyebrow,” arms herself from head to foot, to effect the release of her lover, Calthon. Having accomplished this design, she is discovered, as in the other instances.<sup>9</sup>

5. Carric-Thura.

6. *Ib.*

7. Colnadona.

8. Oithona.

9. Calthon and Colmal.

*Lanul*, “ Full Eye,” the daughter of Cathmol, having been violated by a neighbouring prince, dresses herself in complete armour, and assumes a fictitious name, to solicit the aid of the heroes of Morven. She procures the means of revenge, and then dies of the wounds of injured honour.<sup>10</sup>

*Colma*, “ Fine Hair,” expires on the discovery that her lover and brother had fallen by mutual wounds.<sup>11</sup>

*Brassolis*, “ White Breast,” is presented with the bloody shield of her lover. “ Distracted, pale, “ she flew—she found her youth in all his blood— “ she died on Cromla’s heath.”<sup>12</sup>

The lover of *Gelchossa*, “ White Legs,” expires of a wound received in single combat with his rival. “ Three days she mourned beside her love. “ The hunters found her cold.”<sup>13</sup>

The sister of the king of Scandinavia, falling in love with Trenmor, covers herself with steel armour, assumes a fictitious name, challenges the hero to single combat, and then discovers herself by laying aside her shield.<sup>14</sup>

*Darthula*, “ Fine Eyes,” arms to assist her lover in the field, and afterwards expires of grief on his dead body.<sup>15</sup>

*Lorma*, a Scandinavian Queen, who had eloped with one of the heroes of Morven, was informed,

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10. Cathlin of Clutha.

11. Songs of Selma.

12. Fingal, B. i.

13. Ib. B. v.

14. Ib. B. vi.

15. Dartula,

by a ghost, of the death of her paramour. "She came—she found her hero—her voice was heard no more—silent she rolled her eyes." <sup>16</sup>

*Sulmalla*, "Slowly rolling Eyes," a princess of South Britain, disguises herself like a young warrior, to attend her lover into Ireland. <sup>17</sup>

*Cuthona*, "Moaning Waves," alias, *Gormhuil*, "Blue Eye," "pines away her soul, for the loss of her only love." <sup>18</sup>

*Ninathona*, a Scandinavian lady, is abandoned on a desert rock, by a cruel and ungrateful lover. After her release from this woeful situation, she has a presentiment that the dear deceiver has fallen in battle. "She rose, pale, in her tears—she saw the bloody shield of Uthal—she saw it in Ossian's hand—her steps were distracted on the heath—she flew—she found him—she fell—her soul came forth in a sigh." <sup>19</sup>

To these examples, taken from the collection of Mr. Macpherson, I may add others, out of the sequel of Ossian's poems, published by Mr. Smith, in his *Galic Antiquities*.

*Crimora*, "Great Heart," imagining that her lover, Dargo, was lost at sea, goes to the shore to search for him, and there expires: but whether it was by an accidental, a voluntary, or a sentimental death, we are not distinctly told. <sup>20</sup>

16. Battle of Lora.

17. Temora, B. 2.

18. Conlath and Cuthona.

19. Berrathon.

20. Dargo.



The tender *Crimoina*, “Gentle Heart,” a Scandinavian lady, being foolishly imposed upon by a feigned tale, respecting the death of the same hero, took her harp, and breathed out her lovely soul, amidst the most plaintive and pathetic strains. The melodious notes were still vibrating in the ears of her attendants, when they perceived that she had expired.<sup>21</sup>

*Minla*, “Fine Day,” assuming the character of a *Bard*, armed herself in *mail*, to elude the enemy. When secure in the society of her friends, she dropped the mail, and was immediately recognized.<sup>22</sup>

*Annir* assumed the dress of a young warrior, having contrived a plot, to get rid of an importunate lover; but the stratagem proving fatal to a favoured youth, the lady expired with grief.<sup>23</sup>

*Roscana*, “Fair Rose,” languished and expired, under the slow pangs of disappointment.<sup>24</sup>

If my reader has had patience to go through this catalogue, he will probably acknowledge, that the names of these heroines are *too pretty* to have occurred to the rough Caledonian warriors, in the third century; that they are in the high style of romance; and that they seem, in general, to have been purposely devised, for the adventures which are ascribed to the respective ladies. These ad-

21. Dargo.

22. Duthona.

23. Cathluina.

24. Cuthon, son of Dargo.



ventures, taken singly, may not be absolutely unprecedented, or wholly out of the course of nature. We may have heard of something of the kind; but such things rarely occur. More parallels may be collected from a bundle of futile ballads, than from all the volumes of ancient and modern history. No man, perhaps, could ever tell three tales of the kind, that came within his certain knowledge.

When, therefore, the Bard of Selma details twenty or thirty of these strange stories, in which his own family was implicated, and applies them, without distinction, to the women of Scandinavia, Caledonia, Ireland, and South Britain, common sense compels us to hesitate, before we admit the authenticity of the relations. And if the narratives are not authentic, the poems cannot be the *genuine* works of Ossian, who is represented as reciting the public transactions of his own time. They are the product of a romantic imagination, revolving the same slender stock of ideas, over and over again.

This is not asserted to detract from the merit of the *Bard*, whoever he was, but merely as a caveat against the unwarranted assumptions of the *Historian*. For I am disposed to coincide with the elegant author of the *Critical Dissertation*, in acknowledging the general merit of the poems, as mere works of imagination, to whatever name they are to be ascribed.

“ Here, says Dr. Blair,\* we find the fire and the  
“ enthusiasm of the most early times, combined  
“ with an amazing degree of regularity and art.  
“ We find tenderness, and even delicacy of senti-  
“ ment, greatly predominant over fierceness and  
“ barbarity. Our hearts are melted with the softest  
“ feelings, and, at the same time, elevated with the  
“ highest ideas of magnanimity, generosity, and  
“ true heroism.” Of the poem of Fingal he observes,  
that, “ Examined even according to Aristotle’s  
“ rules, it will be found to have all the essential  
“ requisites of a true and regular epic ; and to have  
“ several of them in so high a degree as, at first  
“ view, to raise our astonishment, on finding  
“ Ossian’s compositions so agreeable to rules, of  
“ which he was certainly ignorant.”—“ The unity  
“ of the epic action, which, of all Aristotle’s rules,  
“ is the chief and most material, is so strictly pre-  
“ served in Fingal, that it must be perceived by  
“ every reader. It is a more complete action than  
“ what arises from relating the actions of one  
“ man, which the Greek critic justly censures as  
“ imperfect : it is the unity of one enterprize, the  
“ deliverance of Ireland from the invasion of  
“ Swaran : an enterprize which has, surely, the full  
“ heroic dignity. All the incidents recorded bear  
“ a constant reference to one end ; no double plot  
“ is carried on ; but the parts unite into a regular

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\* Critical Dissertation, annexed to Macpherson’s Ossian.

“ whole: and as the action is one and great, so it “ is an entire and complete action.”—Of *Temora*, an epic poem in eight books, it is remarked, that “ The subject is an expedition of the hero, to de- “ throne and punish a bloody usurper, and to “ restore the possession of the kingdom to the “ posterity of the lawful prince; an undertaking “ worthy of the justice and heroism of the great “ Fingal. The action is one and complete.”

Such is the language of this enlightened critic, in descanting upon the works before us. To the wreath of Ossian it could add but little splendour, to say that the author of the present Essay fully subscribes to the opinion of Dr. Blair. I admire the poems; but when I am called upon to receive them as authentic documents of ancient times, the very excellence which I acknowledge in the *Bard* becomes a powerful objection to the credit of the *Historian*. To say nothing of that poetical spirit, those rays of pure sublimity, which enlighten every part of these compositions, how are we to reconcile the consummate art, the classical regularity, and the uniform majesty which pervade the whole, with our ideas of a blind Caledonian, of the third century? Nature has displayed her power in producing genius. She has condescended to lead it by the hand—to place it in possession of a certain degree of irregular excellence; but, that the guidance of uncultivated nature cannot, at once, conduct her children in the path of method, of complicated

design, and of uniform dignity, we may conclude from the old Gothic and Icelandic songs, and from the works of the more recent Irish and Caledonian Bards, so often censured by Mr. Macpherson himself. If these geniuses, with the perfect models of Ossian in their mouths, are still irregular, unequal, and obscure, how could the Bard of Selma, without model or precedent, have obtained regularity, uniformity, and a luminous style of composition? The art of the Druidical school is much insisted upon by Dr. Blair, and by the ingenious translator. The Druids had poems; but they were the unequal, rude, and desultory poems of barbarians. That they could have contributed but little, indeed, towards the attainment of the *art of poetry*, we may reasonably collect, from the works of the oldest Welsh Bards, who retain the character of Druidism.

In the poems before us, we distinctly perceive a modern and cultivated genius, working upon the materials of heroic romance. The author must have had excellent models, in some language. He must have had critical rules precisely marked. Where was the Caledonian, of the third century, to procure these things? If he was not absolutely unacquainted with letters, it can hardly be supposed, that he possessed books in any language which could have afforded him the least assistance. Without models, without rules, and without study, these poems were not produced.

But, upon the face of these works, Ossian does not exhibit the picture of a student. His effusions are not represented as the product of silent meditation; they are absolutely *subitaneous*. The wind moving the shield against the wall, the murmuring of a distant stream, or the tones of Malvina's harp, *call back his soul to the Bard*: that is, the most trifling circumstance serves to awake his recollection; and he immediately begins to recite the tale, and pursues it, with the same ease and fluency, as an old soldier might display in recounting the events of a campaign. Nor was this facility of composition confined to the shorter poems. In the conclusion of the *War of Inis Thona*, the Bard thus addresses his attendants:—"O lay me, ye that  
" see the light, near some rock of my hills! Let  
" the thick hazels be around: let the rustling oak  
" be near. Green be the place of my rest. Let the  
" sound of the distant torrent be heard. Daughter  
" of Toscar, take the harp, and raise the lovely  
" *Song of Selma*; that sleep may overtake my soul,  
" in the midst of joy; that the dreams of my youth  
" may return, and the days of the *mighty Fingal*."

Malvina takes the harp—the *Songs of Selma* are chaunted—the Bard is lulled to sleep by the harmonious sounds.—He awakes, and immediately pours forth his *Fingal*, a noble heroic poem, in six books. It need not be observed, that all this could not have been true of the *real author*. 'The extravagant, but highly picturesque idea, may have

occurred to the imagination of some more recent Bard, who did Ossian the honour of composing in his name.

To pass on from this objection—Whatever the natural and acquired endowments of Ossian may have been, during the vigour of his days, the very situation in which he is presented to our view, must entirely set aside his claim to the production of these poems. We have just now seen the helpless, blind, old man, led out to slumber on a shady bank, that he might recruit his spirits, to dictate the poem of Fingal. The picture of extreme debility is abundantly heightened in the body of that admirable work. “ My locks, says the personated Ossian, were  
“ not then so grey ; nor trembled my hands with  
“ age. Mine eyes were not closed in darkness ; my  
“ feet failed not in the race.—But blind, and tear-  
“ ful, and forlorn, I walk with little men. O Fingal,  
“ with thy race of war, I now behold thee not. The  
“ wild roes feed on the green tomb of the mighty  
“ king of Morven!”—Book iii. “ When shall I  
“ cease to mourn, by the stream of resounding  
“ Cona ! My years have passed away in battle ; my  
“ age is darkened with grief.—Whoever would have  
“ told me, lovely maid, when thus I strove in battle,  
“ that blind, forsaken, and forlorn, I should now  
“ pass the night ; firm ought his mail to have been ;  
“ unmatched his arm in war.”—Book iv. Again :—  
“ But I am sad, forlorn, and blind : no more the  
“ companion of heroes ! Give, lovely maid, to me



“ thy tears : I have seen the tombs of all my friends.”  
 The very same picture of the forlorn and wretched  
 Ossian, occurs in the, confessedly, modern poems  
 and romances of the Irish. Thus the Bard addresses  
 St. Patrick, in the poem of *Magnus the Great* :—

“ Thou hast my tale—though memory bleeds,

“ And sorrow wastes my frame,

“ Still will I tell of former deeds,

“ And live on former fame.

“ Now old—the streams of life congeal’d,

“ Bereft of all my joys !

“ No sword this wither’d hand can wield,

“ No spear my arm employs.”\*

See also, in *The Chase*, a long passage, upon  
 which we have the following note :—“ In all these  
 “ poems, the *character* of Oisín is so admirably  
 “ well supported, that we lose the idea of any other  
 “ Bard, and are, *for a time*, persuaded it is Oisín  
 “ himself who speaks. We do not seem to read a  
 “ narration of events, in which *the writer was*  
 “ *neither a witness nor a party* :—it is the *son*—the  
 “ *father*—the *hero*—the *patriot* who speaks ; who  
 “ breathes his own passions and feelings on our  
 “ hearts, and compels our sympathy to accompany  
 “ all his griefs ; while, in a strain of natural and  
 “ impassioned eloquence, he descants on the fame  
 “ and virtues of a parent, whom he describes as,  
 “ at once, so amiable and so great ; and bewails

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\* Reliques of Irish Poetry, p. 65.

“ the loss of all his former friends, kindred, and  
“ companions ; and laments his own forlorn and dis-  
“ consolate state, in apostrophes that pierce the very  
“ heart of pity ! Beside passages which occur in this,  
“ and the two poems of *Magnus* and *Moira Borb*,  
“ the *Dialogue of Oisín and Patrick* exhibits a  
“ very pathetic instance, where, lamenting the loss  
“ of his father and his celebrated Fenii, he exclaims,  
“ To survive them is my depth of woe ! The ban-  
“ quet and the song have now no charms for me !  
“ Wretched, and old, and poor, solitary remnant of  
“ the Fenii ! Why—O why am I yet alive ! Alas,  
“ O Patrick, grievous is my state ! The last of all  
“ my race ! My heroes are gone ! My strength is  
“ gone ! Bells now I hear for the songs of Bards ;  
“ and age, blindness, and woe, are all that remain  
“ of Oisín.”\*

The Irish critics, we perceive, regard this interesting character as *merely representative*. But the Caledonian antiquary contends, that Ossian is the real author of the Galic poems. *Homer and Milton* composed excellent *poetry after their sight had failed*. Well—The minds of these poets were rich with learning, which they had treasured up in their youth, and they still retained something of the vigour of manhood ; but the case of Ossian was not simple blindness. His age, at the time when he is supposed to have dictated these poems, must have

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\*-Reliques of Irish Poetry, p. 76,



exceeded ninety years. And in addition to the infirmities which generally attend such a protracted period of life, he complains of some afflictions that were peculiar to his own fortune.

Thus worn down with years and sorrows, blind, palsied, destitute, and broken-hearted, the Bard hears the sound of the passing gale, or the murmurs of a distant stream, and fancies that the voice proceeds from the ghost of a departed hero ; or else, the wind moves the shield of his fathers, as it hangs on the ruined wall. The incident refreshes his memory. He calls to the aged, feeble, and disconsolate daughter of Toscar, to take the harp. Malvina touches the strings, and Ossian pours forth four or five hundred metrical lines—they contain a well connected, artfully disposed, and eventful story—they are also expressed with as much glow of feeling, brilliancy of description, dignity of sentiment, and heroic ardour, as ever animated the fancy of a youthful and vigorous genius.

If this startles belief—if it overleaps the utmost bounds of probability, what shall we think of an epic poem, of four thousand lines, fraught with all the fire of the *Iliad*, and as regular as the *Æneid*, produced under similar circumstances? Did the man ever exist, who could have composed, extempore, such a poem as the *Fingal*, or the *Temora*! Was the task attempted and accomplished, by a blind, superannuated, palsied, broken-hearted, and illiterate Caledonian, of the third century! In the

enthusiasm of poetic rapture, such absurdities may have escaped the correction of the Bard, who composed in the name of Ossian: or, perhaps, the bold and novel fiction may have pleased his romantic fancy. In poetry, which addresses itself to the imagination, more than to the judgment, a thousand extravagances may be tolerated; but when we look for *historical* facts, we shall always find them, if they are found at all, within the verge of nature and probability.

Let this objection also be overlooked.—Let us, for a moment, suppose a possibility, where it is not, in the case before us. Let Ossian, involved in a mountain of calamities, be admitted as the author of these excellent poems. We may still be allowed to ask,—How were they preserved and transmitted to posterity? If the Bard, at a leisure hour, could recollect his extemporaneous effusions, yet his blindness, not to insist upon other disqualifications, must have prevented his committing them to writing. We read of no attendant friend, but Malvina, and the youth who, occasionally, led him forth to the sunny bank. Did they write the poems from the mouth of the Bard? The very narratives themselves preclude this supposition. Malvina was generally engaged with her harp during the recitals. But we need not look for secretaries in the hall of Selma. The Galic modestly waves all claim to manuscripts of high antiquity. Mr. Macpherson never insists

upon the authority of copies.\* He only drops a few hints about a succession of Bards, who transmitted the works of their predecessors from age to age, by oral tradition. But, with reference to the works of Ossian, how did this tradition commence? For an answer to this question, we must consult the poems themselves. In the tale of *Oinamorul*, the Bard calls—"Daughter of Toscar of helmets, *Wilt thou not hear the song?*" In the beginning of *Cathlin of Clutha*, the *War of Caros*, &c. we have some intimations upon this subject, and more particularly in the conclusion of the last-mentioned poem, where the narrator thus addresses Malvina:—"Bring me the harp, O maid, that I may touch it, when the light of my soul shall arise. *Be thou near, to learn the song; future times shall hear of me.*"

Could the incidents, the artificial arrangement, and even the verse, of a long and complex story, have been committed to memory, from a single recital? The drooping daughter of Toscar might listen; but reason tells us she was not competent to the oral preservation of the tale; and it does not appear that she had a friend in the world to receive it from her mouth.

Thus, in every point of view, the representations which we have upon the face of these poems,

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\* He complains perpetually that the works of Ossian have been interpolated by *modern* Bards.---This complaint would have been precluded by the possession of *ancient* copies.

demonstrate, that they are not the genuine compositions of Ossian, a Caledonian Bard of the third century; and it also appears that, if any such Bard had composed poems of this kind, he must have wanted adequate means to transmit them to posterity.—We have seen that the editor disdains to vindicate the genuineness of his author's works.—We perceive that the æra assigned for the exploits of Fingal, is inconsistent with itself, and with the coincidents of genuine history. The expedition of Caracalla in the beginning, that of Carausius in the close of the third century, and the invasions of the Danes and Norwegians, in the ninth and tenth, are all confounded together. This is at once a proof, that the poems were not composed by Ossian, nor by any one Bard, relating the transactions of his own time; but by some talemaker, who was ignorant of the chronology of those events which he detailed. And this rhapsodist must have lived many ages after the period of the Danish invasions: for, otherwise, he could not have mixed those expeditions with incidents of history, which had preceded them by more than five centuries.

And this proof has been confirmed, by shewing, that the defensive armour, which our heroes are represented as having worn, was not used by the Caledonians and Irish of the third century—that the characters are fictitious—that the manners and sentiments are borrowed from the Northern nations, and heightened by romance—that the author in-

dulges in the most palpable fiction—that he ascribes the same romantic adventures to several different persons—that his art of poetry is such as the Celtic nations had not attained—that Ossian is represented as labouring under personal infirmities and disqualifications, which must have rendered the composition of these poems impracticable to him—and that the Caledonians had no probable means of preserving poems, from times so remote.

These poems, then, do not present us with authentic details of the actions of Fingal, but with fanciful tales, respecting some hero of tradition, distinguished by that name. They are not the genuine works of Ossian, but poetical romances, like those of the Irish Bards, in which Ossian supports a kind of dramatic character—the production of some later age or ages, in which the reputed deeds of Fingal are only viewed at a distance, and in which the name of Ossian is introduced, as merely representative. Considered in this light, their intrinsic merit, as heroic tales, entitles them to respect.

Even the suppositious authority of Ossian is a thing not wholly unprecedented in poetry. Virgil puts the second and third book of his *Æneid* into the mouth of the Trojan prince; but would any critic deem this a sufficient reason for quoting those books, as the genuine works of *Æneas*? Amongst the remains of the Gothic muse, we have also a poem of considerable length, ascribed to Regner Lodbrog, who was confined in a dungeon, to be

destroyed by serpents, as the tale reports. This prince is represented as singing an extemporaneous composition, in his dying agonies, and as only protracting his last breath, to pour out the closing stanza. But as no animate being appears to have been present, to record the lay, excepting the vipers who had stung him to death, ought we not to hesitate, before we pronounce this poem to be the genuine production of Lodbrog? 'The learned author of the *Northern Antiquities* thinks—"There is "some reason to conjecture, that the prince did "not compose more than one or two stanzas of "this poem, and that the rest were added after his "death."\*

But whatever we may think of Mr. Macpherson's critical acumen, in ascribing these poems to an age so remote, his *veracity*, as yet, stands unimpeached. He professes to have found his originals in the Galic language, and attributed to Ossian, as well by general national tradition, as by the internal evidence of his name. All this may be fact. Ossian's signature was also impressed upon a great number of Irish poems; he had the voice of the multitude in his favour, and it is only the severe sentence of criticism which has compelled him to relinquish his unfounded claim. Galic poems may bear the same stamp, and may have obtained the same popular credit; yet we may be right in refusing to receive

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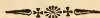
\* *Northern Antiquities*, v. ii. p. 226.

them, as the genuine works of Ossian, or to subscribe to their authority, as authentic documents of history. There is no criterion of the antiquity of *oral tradition*, which only exists in the mouths of the present generation : and we have seen no reason to conclude, that a Galic Poet of learning and genius, in the seventeenth, or even eighteenth century, could not have produced poems, in his native language, as excellent as those which Mr. Macpherson has exhibited in an English dress. I here suppose the existence of Galic originals : for we have evidence which candour must admit, that this gentleman did collect a considerable supply of traditional poetry, from the oral recitations of the Highlanders ; and that he did transfuse, into his popular volumes, some of the matter which he had thus collected.



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## SECTION II.



*On the alterations which Mr. Macpherson appears to have made in the Galic poems, which he is acknowledged to have collected; with remarks upon the arguments which have been adduced, in support of the genuineness of those poems.*

The state in which these poems were collected, concealed by Mr. Macpherson; but elucidated by the aid of the *Galic Antiquities*.---Some account of that book.---The author's candour---his description of Macpherson's originals.---State of the original Galic poems.---Smith, a disciple of Macpherson.---Particulars of the editorial art of these gentlemen.---Remarks on oral tradition.---Arguments of Dr. Blair, Mr. Macpherson, and Mr. Smith, inconclusive.

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IF Mr. Macpherson's character, as Editor of Ossian's poems, has been the subject of improper animadversion; if his veracity has been unjustly doubted, he must have had the less reason to complain, as the injury, principally, arose from the peculiarity of his own conduct. The surprize and the suspicions of the public were very natural, and such as might have been foreseen and expected. A Caledonian Bard, of the third century, was introduced. He had never been heard of before. His poems, a large and excellent collection, had remained in total obscurity, down to our age; and now we are told, for the first time, that they had been accurately preserved, for fifty generations, by a people who had never boasted of their literary treasures.

*Where have these poems been for so many ages? where were their manuscripts concealed, and how discovered? who are the persons by whom they are now recited orally? where may Mr. Macpherson's complete collection be seen and examined? why is it withholden from the public?* Upon an occasion so extraordinary, these and the like questions ought not to have been deemed impertinent. They were

asked, and answered only with sullen disdain. Can we wonder at the scepticism that followed? Mr. Macpherson was called upon, for six connected lines of his originals. He published his revised and *final* edition, without producing *one*. He seems to have committed the cause of Ossian principally to the elegant pen of Dr. Blair, for whose *Critical Dissertation* he probably furnished some private materials. The chief arguments in this celebrated tract, it will be proper for me to consider, when I have, first of all, endeavoured to form some idea of the state in which Ossian came into Mr. Macpherson's hands, that I may obtain a distinct view of the *author* and the *editor*.

But for this purpose it will be necessary to explore some other source of information: and I know of none more promising than the *Galic Antiquities*, of the Rev. John Smith, of Kilbrandon, in Argyleshire. This is a quarto volume, published in 1780. It contains a History of the Druids, a Dissertation on the authenticity of Ossian's poems, and a large collection of poems, chiefly ascribed to the same venerable Bard, with notes and specimens of the originals.

Mr. Smith informs us in his Dissertation, that from his youth he had been an enthusiastic admirer of Ossian—that, early struck with the beauty of some of his poems *in the original*, and finding several which had escaped the inquiries of Mr. Macpherson, he had begun to collect them for his own amuse-

ment—that, *ten years* before his book appeared, he had communicated some of his originals, with their translation, to certain literary friends at Glasgow—that their encouragement and approbation had animated him to pursue his researches with increased diligence; and that the present collection was the fruit of his inquiry. Thus it appears that the work before us was no hasty or unweighed undertaking.

We are also told that this gentleman's researches extended, not only over the West of the Highlands, and into several of the Isles, but also into the more inland and mountainous parts of the country. Here he found many poems, which related the actions of Fingal and his heroes, which were ascribed to Ossian; and, like the works published by Mr. Macpherson, had the name and character of that Bard interwoven in their very texture.\*

Mr. Smith's candour and openness are as remarkable as the sullen taciturnity of his predecessor, whose backwardness to communicate any information respecting his originals, at least, after public curiosity had been excited, is sufficiently known and remembered. In his improved and final edition, he only drops some general hints, relative to an unbroken succession of Bards, and their oral tradition: but Mr. Smith does him the public justice which he had refused to himself. In a note upon p. 95, we are informed, that Mr. Macpherson *is*

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\* See the Diss. Galic Antiq. p. 126, &c. and the poems subjoined.

said to have got his largest and most valuable manuscript of Ossian from a Mr. Macdonald of Croidart: it was *known in the country* by the name of *Leabhar Dearg*, or the *book with the red cover*. Another manuscript he got from M'Vurrich, Bard to Clanronald. Of this *Leabhar Dearg*, we have neither date nor table of contents, nor information as to its present place of repose. Mr. Macpherson has not availed himself of its authority with the public. I therefore conjecture, it may have contained some works of the *Irish Ossian*. We learn from Mr. Smith, that the Highland gentry did entertain *Irish Bards*.\*

Mr. Shaw tells us, in the introduction to his *Galic Grammar*, that the Highlanders had no books but *Irish*, and a few recent tracts, which are written in imitation of the Irish dialect; and, in the introduction to his *Dictionary*, that *the Irish dialect has ALWAYS been the written and studied language*. I may add, that the Irish have been in the habit of naming their books from the colour of the binding; thus, *Leabhar Buidhe*, the *yellow book*, *Leabhar Dubh*, the *black book*, in Edward Llwyd's Catalogue of Irish MSS.†

Of M'Vurrich's manuscript, mentioned above, we have some further information.—“ In a single family only, has any of this order (the Bards) been retained, since the beginning of this century;

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\* *Galic Antiq.* p. 43.

† *Archæol.* p. 435.

“ and the last in that family came down to our times  
 “ in a very advanced life. His favourite songs *are*  
 “ *said* to have been the poems of Ossian. When  
 “ age was coming on, memory beginning to fail,  
 “ and no successor likely to appear, he had so many  
 “ of them as he most admired, committed to writing.  
 “ By a happy coincidence, Mr. Macpherson over-  
 “ took this Bard, and got *his treasure*. This fact,  
 “ with the *red book* formerly mentioned, and some  
 “ other MSS. (not specified) accounts for his having  
 “ found these poems in greater number and per-  
 “ fection than they could ever since be met with.”\*

Thus we are told that Mr. Macpherson *is said* to have obtained two MSS. which *are said* to have contained some of the works of Ossian; but not a syllable of their particular contents has been detailed, and the place where they may still be seen, in the state in which that gentleman found them, has not been mentioned. But one thing is clear: Mr. Macpherson's *treasure* of Galic poems was, for the first time, committed to writing, in the eighteenth century. And it appears from our author, that rival Bards, in different parts of Scotland, as late as the middle of that century, were in the habit of composing *original works* in the name and character of Ossian.† How are we certified that M'Vurrich's *treasure* was not of this description? If these poems were really ancient, it must be

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\* Galic Antiq. p. 125.

† Ibid. p. 92.

deemed a remarkable circumstance that, amongst the multitudes of the higher order, who, for fifty generations had been charmed with their beauties, and animated by their heroism, not a man can be pointed out who chose to grace his library with a single copy. But it seems the labour of copying would have been superfluous. “There are some  
“old men who still repeat a *few of them* as of old,  
“round the flame of the winter fire. But, *are these*  
“*the very poems*, it will be asked, that have been  
“translated and *published* by Mr. Macpherson?  
“The poems which this gentleman and his friends  
“gathered from *oral tradition*, were certainly no  
“other than those we have spoken of as commonly  
“repeated in the country.”\* Begging the author’s  
pardon, this is not coming quite to the point. Mr.  
Macpherson may have *gathered* what the people  
had to bestow; and he might have chosen to publish  
compositions or compilations of his own in their  
stead. But not to be more scrupulous than the  
question requires we should be, it is evident from  
this, and from several other passages in the *Galic*  
*Antiquities*, that certain poems or fragments of  
poems, ascribed to Ossian, were familiarly repeated  
for the entertainment of winter evenings, and,  
therefore, perfectly understood by the populace, at  
the time when this collection was made.

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\* *Galic Antiq.* p. 75; see the note; see also p. 97, 128, 134, 307, 314, &c.



And amongst the pieces of Ossian, which were most generally known five and twenty years ago, and which occurred to Mr. Smith, in the process of collecting from oral tradition, we distinguish several which coincide in their subject with Mr. Macpherson's publications—as, The Battle of *Lora*, the Episode of the *Maid of Craca*, the *most affecting parts* of *Carthon*, *Conlath*, *Croma*, *Berrathon*, the *Death of Oscar*, in the first book of *Temora*, and almost the whole of *Darthula*.\*

Hence we are assured, that some of the most splendid parts of Mr. Macpherson's Ossian, or of poems upon the same subjects, did *actually* exist in the Galic; that Macpherson was not the first inventor of all the poems which he published, and that, had he been so disposed, he might have produced *six* lines of his originals in answer to Dr. Johnson's challenge; though not, perhaps, in that finished style in which he wished Ossian to appear.

That the poems of Ossian should have constituted the popular ballads of the Highlanders, in the middle of the eighteenth century, is a singular and prominent circumstance in their history. It shall be considered hereafter. But in the meantime, it may be proper to inquire, in what manner these poems were repeated, and consequently how far, upon the most favourable hypothesis, they can be supposed to have been preserved by oral tradition.

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\* Galic Antiq. p. 97.



“That we have not *the whole* of the poems of “Ossian,” says the author of the *Galic Antiquities*, “or even of the collection *translated* by Mr. Macpherson, we allow; yet we have *many* of them, “and of *almost all, a part*. The building is not “entire; but we have still the grand ruins of it.”\*

This is a liberal acknowledgment, and the gentleman who makes it will allow us, with equal freedom, to ask—How then was it possible for Mr. Macpherson to present to the public a complete elevation of this grand fabric, when he found it only in *ruins*: and especially, how could he justly delineate those *wings* and *ornaments* of which not even a *part* remained? We may arrive at the solution of this problem, by a careful observation of Mr. Smith’s design as editor, and his manner of executing that design. I shall premise a few words in support of his evidence.

The Highlanders, who furnished this writer’s collection from oral recital, were individuals of the same people who, in the very same age, had supplied Mr. Macpherson in a similar way. The authorities of the former were therefore equally good with those of the latter. It cannot be conceived that the Virtuosi of Scotland would recite to Mr. Macpherson, only the genuine works of Ossian, and to Mr. Smith, only some spurious pieces, which were ascribed to the same Bard, and, in which his cha-

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\* *Galic Antiq.* p. 123.

racter was dramatically introduced. But to obviate the force of such a plea, however absurd in itself, I must again remark, that our author found, amongst his collection, Galic originals of several pieces which had been translated by his precursor. And these had no peculiar mark, by which they could be distinguished, either by the reciters or the collector, as of a different character from the rest of the general mass.

Mr. Smith's poems, therefore, and his authorities for them, stand upon equal ground with those which Mr. Macpherson collected from oral tradition. We may remark further, that Mr. Smith has candidly given the names of his principal contributors, and thus opened the way for the detection of fraud, had any such thing been intended.\*

When we examine the poems themselves, in the translation, we shall discover in them the same peculiar character, the same *wild* excellence, combined with a due regard to essential rules, which mark those of the former collection. If Mr. Smith's poems contain two or three incidents, which the taste of his predecessor would have expunged, this difference resolves itself wholly into the personal judgment of the editor.

No man ever possessed so good an opportunity as the author of the *Galic Antiquities* of discriminating, minutely, the character which his precursør had

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\* *Galic Antiquities*, p. 123, *note*,

supported, in his publication of Ossian. With a competent skill in the Galic language,—with originals of several poems of the former collection in his hands, and with the English translation of those poems before his face, he saw precisely what had been already done, in preparing the works of Ossian, to meet the public eye. His attention to this subject was not that of a cursory, superficial observer. His undertaking demanded of him something more. From originals of the very same kind, he was preparing for the press as many poems as would fill two hundred and twenty quarto pages. They were intended as a sequel to Mr. Macpherson's collection : and it was requisite that they should assimilate with it. It was, therefore, absolutely necessary, that Mr. Smith should study every particular of the art and manner of his master, with the unremitting care of an emulous and ambitious disciple ; that he should reduce his study into practice, and aim at nothing more.

Let us now return to the subject.—Of the state in which these poems came into Mr. Smith's hand, and of the improvements which that hand bestowed upon them, we have the following account:—  
“ Many pieces were found, of no inconsiderable  
“ merit, though *few of them either entire or un-*  
“ *corrupted.* What seemed, in this case, the most  
“ natural expedient, was, to collect from different  
“ quarters, as many editions (oral recitations) as

“ possible, in order to supply the defects, and rectify the mistakes of the one by the help of another.”

All this is very admissible ; but let us proceed—  
“ After the *materials* were collected, the next labour was to compare the different *editions*, to *strike off* several parts that were manifestly spurious ; *bring together* some *episodes that appeared to have a relation* to one another, though *repeated separately* ; and *to restore to their proper places*, some *incidents* that seemed to have *run from one poem into another*. In this I proceeded with all the care and *fidelity* due to such a work. The *most material* of the *alterations* and *transpositions* which I have made, are taken notice of in the notes annexed to their respective poems, and it would be superfluous here to repeat them. It might be equally unnecessary, *if candour did not require it*, to mention the *unavoidable necessity of throwing in*, sometimes, *a few lines or sentences*, as marked in the notes, to *join some of these episodes together*, and to lead the reader through a breach, which must have otherwise remained a hiatus. All these are liberties which *necessity*, in this case, enjoined, and which the laws of criticism, I hope will allow.”\*

I transcribe this passage in the author's own words, in order to communicate some idea of the

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\* Galic Antiquities, p. 128.

*editorship* which was *unavoidably necessary* in preparing the works of Ossian. But where had Mr. Smith acquired this degree of dexterity, so uncommon amongst editors—so readily to reject whole passages—to transpose incidents from one poem to another—to bring together detached episodes, and to *throw in* whole paragraphs of his own; so as to produce regular compositions out of shapeless fragments? Let the reader judge for himself whether I have not already traced out the real source of his art.—During the progress of collecting Galic poems, he met with several of those which had been translated by Mr. Macpherson. Comparing these with the English translation, he saw distinctly what had been already done, and consequently, what remained for him to do, as his work was to agree and unite with the other. It was necessary for him to employ the whole editorial art of his predecessor, and nothing more.

This was taking a ready method to exhibit beautiful and regular English poems; but not to preserve a faithful picture of Ossian, or expose to public view, the real state of poetry in Caledonia. Mr. Smith, however, is ingenuous. His notes detail numerous instances of compilation and composition in which he indulged. This gentleman's rules are before us: and we may safely extend them to the whole of Ossian; whereas, without his aid, we should, for the most part, have been left to our own conjectures

respecting the unprecedented liberties assumed by his mysterious master.

The ænigma is now approaching to its solution—It is no wonder that Ossian is so *ancient*, if every passage and expression, that savoured of recent times and manners, could be struck out, *ad libitum*—no wonder that he is so *beautiful*, if all the choice flowers of Caledonia have been culled to decorate his muse; or so *regular*, if the polished wits and critics of the eighteenth century have *selected* episodes, *transposed* incidents, *formed* and *connected* the tale, from the resources of their own learning and genius. But we have not yet heard the whole evidence in this cause.

“ If any apology be requisite (continues Mr. Smith), for these freedoms, I can add, that I have been, *for the most part*, guided in my conjectures, and even supplied in my *additions*, by the traditional tales, or *Sgeulachds*, which *always accompany* and *explain the old Galic poems*, and which *often remain entire, when the poems themselves are reduced to fragments*. Where these tales did not *throw some ray of light*, I have been always scrupulous *to venture far*, and have, therefore, left several breaches open; considering that, when there was no other way of supplying them, but from *fancy*, any other person had as much right to do that as I had. *Sparing*, however, as I have been of making any *alterations*, which were not *necessary*, and warranted by some of the



“various readings, or by the *tales*, I am sensible  
 “the *form of the poems is considerably altered from*  
 “*what is found in any single one of the editions,*  
 “*from which they were* COMPILED. They have  
 “assumed somewhat more of the *appearance* of  
 “*regularity and art* than they are in that *shape* in  
 “which they are generally to be met with. The  
 “reason of this, which has just now been given,  
 “will, it is hoped, be sustained as sufficient, by such  
 “as might, perhaps, be *better pleased if they were*  
 “*presented to them, in that bold and irregular*  
 “*manner, in which they have been long accustomed*  
 “*to hear them.*”\*

The consideration of these *traditional tales* or romances, mentioned by the author, I must put off to another section, contenting myself for the present, with exhibiting a few instances of the use which he made of them.

“The versification, in *several places*, is broken,  
 “and *only supplied from the traditionary tale*,  
 “which accompanies the poem.”† Again:—“The  
 “most of this paragraph, and part of that before  
 “and after it, *are selected from the traditionary*  
 “*tale of the poem.* The dialogue is *there* carried  
 “on to a greater length, but appears too frivolous  
 “to be translated.”‡ Once more:—“The most of  
 “this paragraph, *with some others that follow,*

\* Galic Antiquities, p. 129.

† Ibid. p. 173, note on *Duthona*.

‡ Ibid. p. 182.



“ particularly *before and after* the song of the old  
“ Bard, *have been supplied from the tales*, as the  
“ *versification* is broken and defective.”\*

Without a constant recollection of the school in which Mr. Smith studied, it will be difficult to conceive, how he could suppose the liberties avowed in these, and many similar passages, to be consistent with the province of a translator, or an editor. Those who oblige the public with versions or editions of ancient authors, never deem such freedoms warrantable; nor do I think this gentleman could have supposed they came within his sphere, and have given himself credit for his frugal use of them, had he not observed, that they had been already employed, with still greater latitude, in adorning the muse of Ossian.

The pieces contained in the Galic Antiquities assimilate with the shorter poems published by Mr. Macpherson. The author has exhibited nothing that can be compared with a *Fingal* or a *Temora*. Was this the necessary consequence of his boasted self-denial, in forbearing *to venture far*, where neither the incidents of the poem, nor a *kindred* episode, in another poem, nor some one of his *various readings*, nor even the *popular tale*, threw *some ray of light* upon the subject; and *when there was no other way of supplying* incident and connection, but *from fancy and conjecture*?

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\* Galic Antiq. p. 345, notes on the *Fall of Tara*.

That Mr. Macpherson indulged freely in the use of liberties such as these, we learn, principally, by inference, from the avowed conduct and practice of his pupil—from what he found *absolutely necessary* in an editor of Ossian. His master's secrecy and mystery, upon this subject, have withholden most of the direct evidence, which we could have wished to produce; yet something may be discovered.

Amongst the *fragments* of Ossian, which are still *most generally known*, Mr. Smith found *the most affecting parts of Carthon, Conlath, Croma, and Berrathon*: from these *parts*, Mr. Macpherson restored the *entire poems*. *Almost the whole of DARTHULA* was repeated: this *almost* was converted into an *altogether*. *The Death of Oscar was well known as a separate tale*: we now find it incorporated into the *Temora*, a complete epic poem, in eight books.\*

Mr. Macpherson himself gives us a few distant hints, relative to his editorial mystery. In the preface to his *final* edition, we perceive him *restraining some exuberances in imagery*, which had appeared in his former edition. These *exuberances* are acknowledged to have been *his own*: it must follow, that he had made some additions to Ossian. But he had also retrenched from him, in many instances. In a note upon *Colnadona*, he mentions an episode, handed down so imperfectly, that *it does not deserve*

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\* See *Galic Antiquities*, p. 97.

*a place in the poem.* In a note upon *Cathlin of Clutha*, we discover Mr. Smith's licence for *selecting* and *transposing*—"The Highland Senachies (modern Bards) have prefixed to this poem, an address of Ossian to Congal, the young son of Fergus, *which I have rejected*, as having no manner of connection with the rest of the piece. It has poetical merit; and, probably, it was the opening of one of Ossian's other poems, though the *Bards*, injudiciously, *transferred* it to the piece now before us." Impressed with this idea, Mr. Macpherson would, undoubtedly, have *re-transferred* this address, had he found a more convenient place for it. Thus we find the editor charging the modern Bards with every irregularity, which he discovers in the works of Ossian, and assuming to himself the unlimited right of adjusting the page of his author, agreeably to his own taste.

Again: in a note upon *Sulmala of Lumon*, we are told—"The Highland Senachies, who, *very often*, endeavoured to supply the deficiency, they thought they found in the tales of Ossian, have given us the continuation of the story of the daughter of Surandronlo. The catastrophe is so unnatural, and the circumstances so ridiculously pompous, that for the sake of the inventors, I shall conceal them." See also two notes on *Cath-Loda*, Duan 2, a very long note on the beginning of Duan 3—two notes on *Cathlin of Clutha*, a note on *Temora*, book iii. &c.: from all which, it fully appears, that

Mr. Macpherson did not publish these poems as he found them ; but that he exercised an unlimited authority over his originals, condemning, as the interpolations of modern Bards, and rejecting, without ceremony, whatever passages or expressions were thought to militate against the *antiquity*, the *beauty*, or the *regularity* of Ossian.

Of his *additions* we have no particular account. But when we know that, till very lately, Galic poems were preserved only by oral tradition ; when we recollect the manner in which they were repeated—as the words of popular airs—as detached episodes, and as broken, irregular rhapsodies—we shall not want conviction, that additions were as indispensably necessary to Mr. Macpherson as to his pupil, Mr. Smith. And when the former gentleman *assures his antagonists, that he should not translate what he could not imitate*,\* he, undoubtedly, points to a necessary qualification in the editor, who would represent Ossian as consistently *ancient*, as uniformly *beautiful*, and as strictly *regular*.

For the complete elucidation of this fact, we are indebted to Mr. Smith : and, to those who might wish to discover truth respecting the works of Ossian, I would recommend a diligent perusal of the dissertation and notes, in the *first edition* of the Galic Antiquities.

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\* Diss. on the poems of Ossian.

I do not mean to insinuate, that the research would strip Mr. Macpherson of all his laurels. If it would set aside his title to the credit of *original* composition, or to the humbler praise of a *faithful* translator; it would still leave him in possession of something valuable. He might still enjoy the satisfaction of having produced, from rude and defective materials, a collection of spirited and amusing poems, in a novel style. But he should not have published them as genuine works of Ossian, or grounded historical facts upon their authority.

If the editors of Galic poetry had confined themselves to the mere selection and transposition of the sentences of old songs, their works would be of that kind, which the ancients distinguished by the name of *Cento*. Like the compiler of *Virgilius Evangelizans*, they might have still claimed the privilege of making their author say what he never intended. But when they go still farther, and connect episodes with incidents of popular tales, and imagery of their own fancy, they can only aspire to the reputation of having produced something analogous to the more modern title of *Olla Podrida*.

Mr. Smith has done his precursor the justice to vindicate his character, from the *unqualified* imputation of imposture, with which it had been injured, by some writers of credit. He records instances of his candour, which were either unknown in England, or unregarded. He also furnishes strong collateral evidence, that Galic poems, on the exploits of the

Fingalian heroes, did exist. He produces several hundred excellent lines, as specimens of his own collection, and some, even of Mr. Macpherson's. In an advertisement prefixed to his volume, he promises the public a complete edition of all his originals, upon due encouragement: he met that encouragement, and fulfilled his engagement. He assures us, that several parts and episodes of these poems are still repeated in families; that they are accompanied with ancient original music, and that their language is perfectly understood.\*

The same thing appears in Mr. Macpherson's publication. "The paragraph just now before us" (says that writer), is the song of *Conban-Carglas*, "at the time she was discovered by Fingal. It is "in lyric measure, and set to music, which is wild "and simple, and so inimitably suited to the situation of the unhappy lady, that few can hear it "without tears."† Again:—"This episode is, in "the original, extremely beautiful. It is set to that "wild kind of music, which some of the Highlanders "distinguish by the title of *Fón Oimarra*, the song "of the mermaids, &c."‡ And this reminds me of that remarkable circumstance which I have already mentioned; namely, the long period of popularity which the muse of Ossian is supposed to have enjoyed. The editors of Galic poetry adjudge many

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\* Galic Antiq. p. 95, 97, 122, 128, 134, 307, 314.

† Note on *Cath Loda*. *Duan i.*

‡ *Ibid.* *Duan ii.*



of the ballads and songs, which were familiar to the illiterate Highlander, in the middle of the eighteenth century, to be *undoubtedly the composition of Ossian*.\* But, considering the æra assigned to that Bard, this opinion appears to me very objectionable. If even those detached episodes and fragments, which adorn the bottom of Mr. Smith's pages, were composed in the beginning of the fourth century, the circumstance of their being still so perfectly understood, as to constitute the trivial amusement of winter evenings, in the Highland cottage, is the most singular phænomenon that Scotland can produce. It places the language of that country upon a most stable basis, very different from that of any other Celtic nation.

Ireland boasts the stability of her language, and, I believe, with some reason ; but, at the same time, her antiquaries find it difficult to translate poems, of far more recent composition, and fairly acknowledge, that such poems could have been preserved only in writing. As for my own countrymen, I must put them entirely out of the question. *Taliesin* and *Aneurin* have been obscure for a thousand years. Their poems seem, at present, to be in a dead language. Even the elegant and pathetic *Davydd ab Gwilym*, who wrote little more than four centuries ago, would frequently want an interpreter, in the families which speak the purest modern Welsh.

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\* See *Galic Antiquities*, p. 97.



Chevy Chace, and the ballads of Robin Hood, were composed about the time of Elizabeth. Some fragments of them may still be found in the mouths of a few English rustics: but who, excepting the poring antiquary, can now be entertained with Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, or the *Visions* of Pier's Plowman?

Before we can admit, that the language of Ossian, alone, possesses an exemption from mortality, we must demand some evidence of this its distinguished privilege, stronger than any which has hitherto come before us. For what does that amount to?

The editors found the name of Ossian in those fragments of poems which they collected. The origin of those fragments was unknown; but the *populace*, those judges of the accidents of language, esteemed them ancient and genuine; their subjects also referred to some remote ages. National prepossession was in their favour; and the translators were patriots. They received them as they found them, and the patriotic bias easily disposed them to ratify their credentials. Why should they be the first to suspect that their composition was more recent than the times which they described? Why should they search for evidence or argument, which could only have tended to the degradation of the Caledonian muse?

National prepossession takes a strong hold, even of vigorous minds. Ossian was contemplated not only as an ancient, but as an excellent poet. Many

of the fragments which bore his name, countenanced this opinion. We have seen that Mr. Smith, whilst he culls his various readings,—whilst he prunes, selects, transposes, and ransacks the popular tales, and his own fancy, for connective paragraphs,—is fully persuaded that *he is only restoring Ossian*. Had Mr. Macpherson less of the patriotic enthusiasm? Was he less zealous for the glory of Scotland? He obtained Mac Vurrich's treasure. He was struck with the beauty of many of the fragments it contained. He wished to communicate to the public an idea of that beauty. From oral tradition, he made collections of his own. His various readings suggested many improvements. The popular tales, which treated of the same subjects, presented spontaneous hints of easy connection, and the poems began to grow into form. Ossian, every day, appeared more worthy of himself. Excellence was now full in the editor's view; and his taste and genius, neither of which he possessed in a contemptible degree, spurred him on to the attainment of that excellence. He had begun well; but where was he to have checked his career? At what precise point ought he to have stopped his improving hand? At what period, to have blotted out the name of *Ossian*, and substituted that of *Macpherson*? A great change was effected; but it was effected by degrees.—The old *woollen* stockings, by repeated mendings, were gradually converted into *silk*.

Mr. Macpherson's first publication, he tells us, was merely accidental. Several of the fragments which he had worked up into his *Fingal*, being well known in Scotland, as the reputed works of that hero's son, the editor modestly retained the name of Ossian. He may have thought that he had only restored the poem to that brilliancy and polish, with which it was originally adorned by the venerable Bard. But when the doubts of the public, who had not quite so high an opinion of old Celtic poetry, and their loud clamours for the original, became troublesome, how was the editor either to reclaim the work for himself, or to exhibit his Galic author? Could he declare that he had no originals? That would have been unjust to the cause of his country. Could he produce his fragments and episodes, tacked together by paragraphs of humble prose, or awkward imitations, in hobbling verse? That would have been exposing both Ossian and himself to ridicule. Nothing was left but to intimate to the public, in his *final edition*, that Macpherson and Ossian went partners in fame—that he was both the *author* and *translator*, and that he could *imitate* as well as Anglicise the native beauties of the Caledonian muse. To his friends he also frequently repeated a kind of *sine die* promise, that the original Bard should step forth; that is, I suppose, if ever he should be able to furnish him with a robe suited to his princely dignity.

In denying the genuineness of the poems of Ossian, and even their existence, as Galic poems, in the form in which they present themselves to the English reader, I avail myself of the direct evidence of the author of the *Galic Antiquities*: but I have also suggested, that those episodes and fragments, which the Highlanders actually repeat, as the works of this Bard, are not genuine: and this I have done, in contradiction to the opinion of the last mentioned writer, who thinks that, to all men of judgment, taste, and candour, who have perused with attention, either the poems themselves, or the able and elegant defence of their authenticity by Dr. Blair, all future vindication must appear a superfluous labour.\*

Arguments vary in their force and effect, as the point which they are directed to substantiate, is more or less probable in itself. And though I think the cause of Ossian too desperate for the undertaking of the most able advocate, yet, to him who touches upon this subject, the arguments of such a writer as Dr. Blair, must be the objects of attention. I shall therefore briefly consider such of them as may not, incidentally come in my way, in other parts of this essay.

It must, first of all, be observed, that the Doctor acknowledges his ignorance of the original poems, and of the language in which they are asserted to have been composed. His reasoning arises from a

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\* *Galic Antiq.* p. 87.

view of the translation, and, perhaps, from some private hints that were put into his hands. The principal part of the *Critical Dissertation* only descants on the merit of Ossian, as a poet. Having acknowledged his excellence in general terms, the author proceeds to his first defensive argument. In this, he meets the grand objection, *That Ossian's poetry is too regular and artificial, for the age and country in which he is supposed to have lived.* Upon this subject the elegant writer is very copious; but the substance of his argument amounts to this—That Ossian may have derived his art of poetry from that order of Bards which was connected with the Druidical Establishment.

This hypothetical reasoning assumes—That the old Celtic Bards were excellent poets—that Ossian had studied their manner, and acquired their art; and, consequently, was qualified to compose excellent and regular poems, upon the model of these masters.

But if we may judge from the oldest specimens of poetical composition, which have been preserved by different Celtic nations, the poetry of those Bards was extremely rude, uncouth and unequal. It was, in every respect, very dissimilar from the works which have been ascribed to Ossian: and, therefore, if Ossian was the disciple of those Bards, he could not, possibly, have been the author of the poems in question.\* If he was not their disciple, his art of

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\* See the Odes of the ancient Irish in the Relics of Irish poetry, and the Transactions of the R. I. Academy, for the year 1788: see also the specimens and description of the old Welsh Bards, in Mr. Turner's *Vindication*.

poetry is still unaccounted for, and the great objection unanswered. The Doctor had conceived a very erroneous idea of the state of poetry amongst the ancient Celts. Let this error be corrected, and the whole force of this primary argument is immediately directed against the authenticity of Ossian.

Doctor Blair's second argument is thus expressed :—" The manners of Ossian's age, as far as " we can gather them from his *writings*, were " abundantly favourable to a poetical genius. The " two dispiriting vices, to which Longinus imputes " the decline of poetry, covetousness and effeminacy, " were, as yet, unknown. The cares of men were " few. They lived a roving, indolent life ; hunting " and war were their principal employments ; and " their chief amusements, the music of the Bards, " and the feast of shells."

But, for most of the particulars in this description we need not resort to the *writings* of the Galic Bard : they were applicable to the Highlanders, in the days of our fathers. 'The picture is sketched, in nearly the same words, by Sir J. Dalrymple,\* as well as by the editors of Ossian. Were the Highlanders rich and covetous ; were they soft and effeminate, seventy years ago ? Were they industrious, and fully occupied with business ? Had they forgotten the pleasures of the chase, their ancient glory in war, the music and tale of the Bards, or

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\* See their description at large, in the *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland*.



the abundance of the feast? And if the manners here implied were favourable to poetical genius, in the third and fourth centuries, why should they be deemed less favourable in the seventeenth and eighteenth, when some portion of learning might be called in to their assistance?

The author of the *Critical Dissertation* observes, in the next place:—"The compositions of Ossian are so strongly marked with characters of antiquity, that, although there were no external proof to support that antiquity, hardly any reader of judgment and taste, could hesitate in referring them to a very remote æra. There are four great stages, through which men successively pass, in the progress of society. The first and earliest is the life of hunters; pasturage succeeds to this, as the ideas of property begin to take root; next agriculture; and lastly, commerce."

The particulars under this head are the following, to which I subjoin a few obvious remarks.—1. "Here are but few allusions to pasturage, and no traces of agriculture."—But the case is precisely the same, in Irish poems of the fifteenth century, which treat of Fingal and his heroes, and in Scotch poems of a still more recent date. The Bards were not describing scenes which were present before them. They were aware, that the subjects of their tales were placed in a simple and remote age: their fancy, of course, would not dwell upon modern improvements, and familiar objects. The rhymers



of Queen Elizabeth's days have well preserved the barbarous manners of Robin Hood's age.—2. “ No cities appear to have been built in the territories of Fingal.”—Could we ascertain the precise boundaries of the kingdom of *Morven*, we should probably find no *cities* within the same limits, at the present day. This poetical dominion was evidently small. The hero could hardly start a buck, without running him into the territories of some neighbouring prince; yet the dominions of Fingal contained the *grey walls* and *hundred towers* of *Selma*, and the royal palace of Tura.\*—3. “ Every thing presents to us the most simple and unimproved manners—at the feast, the heroes prepare their own repast.”—But nearly such have been the manners of the Highlanders, and such the custom of hunting parties, and companies of warriors, to a very recent age. The fourth argument is stated thus:—“ The representation of Ossian's times must strike us the more, as genuine and authentic, when it is compared with a poem of later date, which Mr. Macpherson has preserved, in one of his notes. It is that wherein five Bards are represented as passing the evening in the house of a chief, and each of them, separately, giving his description of the night.—The author has allowed some images to appear, which betray a later period of society—whereas, in Ossian's works, from beginning to end, all is consistent.”

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\* See *Galic Antiq.* p. 313, &c.

The poem here alluded to is a *single* instance, in which the professed purpose of the author is, to paint the scene which is actually moving before his eyes. The province of those Bards, who composed in the character of Ossian, was totally different. It was their business to sketch what they thought a just representation of a remote age. We must also recollect what Mr. Macpherson repeatedly inculcates to us, that he *strikes off*, as the interpolation of later Bards, every paragraph and expression that seems inconsistent with the age, which he assigns to his poems. This argument, therefore, is only complimentary to the judgement of Ossian's editor.

Let us proceed to the next.—“ The circle of “ ideas and transactions is no wider than suits such “ an age ; nor any greater diversity introduced into “ characters, than the events of that period would “ naturally display.” This might be regarded as an instance of judgment, in the compilers of the poems, had not the editor repeatedly assured us, that the ideas of the modern Galic Bards are still confined within the same narrow circle.

We are told, in the next place, that “ The manner “ of composition bears all the marks of the greatest “ antiquity. No artful transitions ; nor full and “ extended connection of parts ; such as we find “ among the poets of later times, when order and “ regularity of composition were more studied and “ known.” Whoever attends to the conduct of the story, and the collocation of episodes, in the Fingal

and Temora, not to mention the smaller poems; whoever adverts to Mr. Macpherson's elucidations, throughout the whole collection, must be convinced, that abundance of well directed art has been employed; infinitely more than what appears in the work of any other poet, of a rude and barbarous age. Of this, Doctor Blair himself is fully aware, when he tells us—"There we find the fire and the enthusiasm of the most early times, combined with "an *amazing degree of regularity and art:*" and when he represents nature and the Druidical school, as having taught Ossian *all the essential rules of Aristotle*. As for the *connections of parts*, it is pretty clear, from what has been already quoted out of the Galic Antiquities, that the editors are responsible for most of them, whether good or bad.

Again; it is said that "The language has all the figurative cast, and all the marks of genuine antiquity." Mr. Smith, who recapitulates all the Doctor's arguments, dwells at some length, on the topic of Ossian's language. This subject occurs in the 90th page of his volume; and in a note at the bottom of the page, he informs us, that the *same style is still used in Galic compositions*. This fact is also evident, from the modern pieces, which both Mr. Smith and Mr. Macpherson have quoted in their notes. And the last mentioned author observes, that *the modern tales of the Highlanders preserve the very language of the Bards*.—The converse of this proposition is, probably, nearer to

the real fact. What, then, is there peculiarly antique in the language of Ossian?

The next argument adduced in the Critical Dissertation seems to be utterly at variance with the *first*, in which Ossian is represented as a disciple of the Druidical Bards.—It is in these words:—  
 “ There are besides, two other circumstances to be  
 “ attended to, still of greater weight, if possible.—  
 “ One is *the total absence of religious ideas from*  
 “ *this work*, for which the translator has, in his  
 “ preface, given a very probable account, on the  
 “ footing of its being the work of Ossian. The  
 “ Druidical superstition was, in the days of Ossian,  
 “ on the point of its final extinction; and for particular reasons, odious to the family of Fingal;  
 “ whilst the Christian faith was not yet established.”

I have already remarked several coincidences, between the history of the Caledonian and the Irish Ossian. The *Atheism* of the latter, or his absolute ignorance of religion, is not the least remarkable trait of his character. Of this, Miss Brooke, in her *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, has exposed some shocking instances. Thus, p. 88, the Bard addresses St. Patrick:—

“ Where was thy God, when Magnus came---

“ Magnus the brave and great;

“ The man of might, the man of fame,

“ Whose threat’ning voice was fate!

“ Thy Godhead did not aid us then;---

“ If such a God there be,

“ He should have favour’d gallant men,

“ As great and good as He.” &c. &c.

But to return to the argument—Is it probable, that the *poetical art* of the Druids, whatever it may have been, survived their superstition ; or that the disciples of their school, amongst whom Ossian has been ranked, would not have preserved some tincture of the fountain from whence they drew ? We know that the very contrary has happened to the old Bards of the Britons. There is hardly an atom of art in all they have left us ; but they are full of mythological allusion, and druidical superstition. It should appear, then, that Ossian was not a disciple of the druidical Bards ; and, at any rate, that either this argument, or the other, must be expelled. In the writing of such an author as Dr. Blair, we should not have expected to be reminded of the pellets of a boy's popgun. But these materials may have been put into his hands in their present arrangement, and suffered to pass without due examination, and cool reflection. As the Doctor, however, has referred us to the *translator*, let us hear his account.—In the *Dissertation concerning the æra* of Ossian, we are told, that, in the time of *Trathal*, the great-grandfather of our Bard, a civil war commenced, which soon ended, in almost the total extinction of the religious order of the Druids—that a total disregard for the order, and utter abhorrence of the druidical rites, ensued. Under this cloud of public hate, all that had any knowledge of the religion of the Druids, became extinct, and the nation fell into the last degree of ignorance, of

their rites and ceremonies.—In the poem of *Cathlin* of *Clutha*, Trenmor, the great-grandfather of Fingal, with his young son, Trathal, is represented as having entirely broken the power of the Druids, and their *Scandinavian* auxiliaries. But the poems, as well as the prose romances of the Caledonians, are inconsistent. In two long “poems of Ossian,” in Mr. Smith’s collection, we find Dargo, the son of the chief Druid, and his son Cuthon, at the head of powerful armies, with their *Scandinavian* auxiliaries, opposed to Fingal and his sons, Ossian and Fergus.\* Thus we find Ossian, the *historian of his own times*, varying no less than four or five generations, in the account of a great and public event—undetermined whether he should ascribe the glory of the victory to his father, or to his great-grandfather, or to himself.

Mr. Macpherson having, in his Dissertation, accounted, *as we have seen*, for Ossian’s silence, respecting the druidical religion, proceeds two pages, and then adduces the absence of allusion to Christianity, as an argument, that the Bard had composed, at an æra prior to the introduction of that religion: and yet, in the intermediate page, he has told us, that those who *write* in the Galic language—he uses the *present* tense—seldom mention religion in their profane poetry; and he regards this custom alone, as a satisfactory account for the author’s silence, concerning the religion of ancient times.

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\* Galic Antiq. p. 277, and 293.



What kind of reasoning is this! Ossian never mentions religion: it is the custom of the *modern* Galic Bards not to mention religion, in their profane poetry; therefore Ossian must be *ancient*!

I now proceed to Dr. Blair's other great circumstance; namely, "The entire silence, which reigns, " with respect to all the great clans or families, which " are now established in the Highlands."

Though we contend that the author of these poems did not compose *in* the third century; yet we must maintain, that he composed *for* that age, or for some period of remote antiquity. Many of the present families are ancient: their origin, notwithstanding, may be discovered; and the author would not commit himself so far as to place them in the days of Fingal. In disallowing the Bard's claim to high antiquity, we do not mean to deny him the exercise of common sense, and of a considerable degree of shrewdness.

The poem ascribed to Rowley, on the Battle of Hastings, mentions none of the English nobility of the fourteenth or fifteenth century, as present in that action; but this silence has not been adduced as a strong argument, that young Chatterton was not the real author.

Of the general system of *Clanship*, the Galic Bard does not appear to have been ignorant. If we are not allowed to assert, that the heroes, and the young warriors, who always attended Fingal, in the field, in the chase, and at the feast, constituted his



appropriate clan, or rather the clan of *Trenmor*, and that the friendly or hostile chiefs, who were close at his elbows, may be considered as the heads of other clans; yet, the poems themselves, will assist us, in pointing out some establishments of this kind. In the poem of *Carthon*, we read—"Cathul rose in his strength, the son of the mighty Lormar: three hundred youths attended the chief; *the race of his native streams.*" Here the editor remarks in a note—"It appears from this passage, that *clan-ship was established in the days of Fingal*, though not on the same footing with the present tribes, in the north of Scotland."

I have now considered the arguments, upon which Dr. Blair regards the antiquity of Ossian, and the genuineness of his poems, as fully established.—"All these (concludes the author) are marks so undoubted, and some of them too, so nice and delicate, of the most early times, as to put the high antiquity of these poems out of question."

With the most sincere endeavours to divest myself of prejudice, I have minutely examined these marks; but I have still the mortification to differ in opinion from a writer so elegant and so respectable. I can find here no satisfactory evidence of the antiquity of these poems. In a cause less desperate than that of Ossian, all these particulars could be produced only as corroborative circumstances. Mixed with solid and substantial proofs, they might

properly adorn and fill up an argumentative discourse: without such proofs, they do nothing.

The works themselves, in the state in which Mr. Macpherson found them, were such, I humbly presume, as a man of genius and some learning may have produced, within the two last centuries. I will suppose the Bard to have lived in the Highlands, and to have had the popular tales of his country, and some fragments of its more ancient poetry, with similar fragments of the Irish Bards, present to his recollection. He had now nothing to do but to select and versify the most interesting parts of his traditional stories, in a manner suited to the taste of his audience. The works thus produced, having been new modelled, pruned, connected, and adorned, by the judgment, discernment, and imitative genius of Mr. Macpherson, might easily have assumed that form in which we now find them.

I have already remarked, that the editor seems to have committed the question of antiquity and genuineness, principally, into the hands of Dr. Blair: but he has not entirely neglected their defence, in his own person. In his Dissertation concerning the *æra*, he remarks,—“ The strongest  
“ objection to the antiquity of the poems, now given  
“ to the public, *under the name of Ossian*, is the  
“ improbability of their being handed by tradition,  
“ through so many centuries. Ages of barbarism,  
“ some will say, could not produce—such poems;  
“ and could these ages produce them, it is impossible

“ but they must be lost, or altogether corrupted, in  
“ a long succession of barbarous generations.”

This truly formidable objection, the author endeavours to refel, by ascribing the preservation of the poems to the Bards, the disciples of the Druids, who had their minds opened, and their ideas enlarged, by being initiated into the learning of that celebrated order. We have already seen the other face of this argument; but let the writer have his own way. If this character, however, was applicable to the Bard who originally produced the poems, and to those who first received them from his mouth; yet, it is acknowledged, that the order soon degenerated: for we are presently told, that their successors became exceedingly fanciful, fabulous, and absurd.—“ They loved to place the founders  
“ of their families in the days of fable, when poetry,  
“ without fear of contradiction, could give what  
“ characters it pleased to her heroes.” We are afterwards informed, that every chief, in process of time, had a Bard in his family—that the office became, at last, hereditary—that the successors of these Bards handed down the poems, from generation to generation, by oral tradition—that they repeated them, to the whole clan, upon solemn occasions, and that this custom came down to our own times.

We have partly heard the editor’s character of those pilots, whose office it was, to conduct Ossian in safety, over the perilous gulf of fifty barbarous

generations. But lest we should have misconceived his meaning, let us listen again.—“ A succession of  
 “ Bards was retained, in every clan, to hand down  
 “ the memorable actions of their forefathers. As  
 “ Fingal and his chiefs were the *most renowned*  
 “ *names in tradition*, the Bards *took care to place*  
 “ *them in the genealogy of every great family.*  
 “ They *became famous among the people*, and an  
 “ OBJECT OF FICTION AND POETRY to the Bards.  
 “ The Bards erected their immediate patrons into  
 “ heroes, and celebrated them in their songs. As  
 “ the circle of their knowledge was narrow, their  
 “ ideas were confined in proportion. A few happy  
 “ expressions, and the manners they represent,  
 “ may please those who understand the language;  
 “ their obscurity and inaccuracy would disgust in a  
 “ translation.”\*

We may judge, from hence, of the *fidelity, capacity*, and *accuracy* of such oral reciters. They are elsewhere described as *indelicate, absurd*, and *puerile* in the extreme—a pretty strong proof, that their memory was not furnished with such excellent models as the poems of Ossian. The *strong objection* therefore remains in full force. The poems were produced in a more cultivated age; and, as they were not preserved in writing, that age did not precede—it must have come after the times of the *trivial* and *puerile* Bards.

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\* Diss. on the Poems of Ossian.

Mr. Smith has also added a few circumstances to the observations of Dr. Blair. He finds some names of places in Scotland, derived from Fingal and his heroes; as, *Cruach Fhionn*, the *Hill of Fingal*:—but *Fhionn* implies also, *white, fair, small*, &c.; it might, therefore, enter into the descriptive name of a place, without any reference to Fingal. So also, among the Isles, we find *Inis Chonnain*, *Inis Aildhe*—the Isle of *Connan*, *Aldo*, &c. But the poets may have borrowed names of fabulous heroes from the appellatives of places, as Geoffrey of Monmouth had his *Camber* from *Cambria*, his *Albanactus* from *Albania*, &c. On the other hand, we must not forget, that the Bards loved to engraft the founders of their patrons' families into the connections of Fingal.

Again: the *poems* are said to contain many *Galic proverbs*: but may not the Bards have borrowed proverbs from the people, as well as the people from the Bards?

Several gentlemen, having desired the Highlanders to explain passages of old poems, which they repeated, found their extemporaneous explanation correspondent with the English version.\*

Mr. Smith infers,—“ Either these persons were “inspired, or Ossian’s poems are authentic.” This conclusion is not warranted by the premises, which only prove, that those particular passages did exist

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\* *Galic Antiq.* p. 97.

in the Galic, and that they had been faithfully translated. Here is no document of the existence of any entire poem, nor of the age and authenticity of these very passages.

*Harold Harfager conquered the Hebrides in 875, and the Galic names of those Islands* are said to have been, *consequently, lost; but several of them are still found in the poems of Ossian*: whence it is inferred, that those poems are of higher antiquity than the reign of Harold.\* But surely these names did not vanish immediately upon the Norwegian conquest. The old inhabitants were neither extirpated nor expelled: for the Galic language is still spoken in those Islands. When the natives used their own language, they would certainly continue to designate their country, by the names which they had derived from their forefathers. Edward the First finally conquered Wales; but the inhabitants still use their native terms for the country in general, and for its particular districts. The Highlanders also, who knew these Islands, would naturally, for some generations at least, continue to distinguish them by their usual names. The Britons had lost *Worcester, Gloucester, York*, and the *Isle of Wight*, long before the age of Harold; yet they still remember *Caer Warangon, Caer Loyw, Caer Ewrawg*, and *Ynys Wyth*. After all, the names of Islands which are found only in these

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\* Galic Antiq. p. 93.

poems, may not be authentic. A composer of romance may speak of the *Isle of Whales*, the *Isle of Waves*, the *Isle of Mist*, the *Rocky Isle*, &c. without being a great proficient in ancient geography.

These are the principal arguments for the antiquity of Ossian, which I find in the dissertations and notes attached to his works. To search for more of the same kind, in all the Scotch Dissertations, Sketches, Histories, &c. &c. which have appeared since the year 1761, would be endless labour: but though the field be so wide, I am persuaded the harvest would prove but scanty.—It may be taken for granted, that the best and steadiest troops of the King of Morven are those which surround his royal person.

I therefore quit this part of the subject, with the general impression, that the false principles, in conclusive arguments and clashing hypotheses, which appear in the defenders of Ossian, arise from the weakness of the cause: and I proceed to feel out my way, as well as I can, towards the real origin of these poems.





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## SECTION III.



*On the origin of the Galic poems, with some conjectures relative to the principal hero whom they celebrate.*

The poems partly arose from the traditional tales,---Account of those tales,---The Irish had similar tales,---Which were the originals?---The publicity of the Irish---and obscurity of the Scotch tales---prove that the former were the originals,---Conjectures on the history of Fingal,---Mr. Macpherson's calculation of his æra---contradictory in itself,---Attempt to discover his æra---probably, the close of the *ninth* century---though some Irish and Scotch poems bring him down to the end of the *eleventh*,---The Caledonian Bard imitates an Irish poem of the *fifteenth* century---this circumstance furnishes a fair criterion of the age of the Galic poems.

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IF these poems, I mean, the detached episodes, and fragments of poems, which the Highlanders actually repeat, are not the composition of Ossian, or of any other Bard, in those early times, which they describe, it may be asked, what general idea ought we to form of the manner of their production?

My opinion is, that they did not originate from one simple source, but that some of them were compiled out of the popular tales of the Highlanders; and others, out of similar tales of the Irish nation; whilst a third series may be regarded as direct imitations of Irish poems.

There can be little doubt that the immediate parents of several of these pieces, are to be sought amongst *the traditional tales*, or *Sgeulachds*, mentioned by Mr. Smith, *which always accompany and explain the old Galic poems, and which often remain entire, when the poems themselves are reduced to fragments.\** From these tales they were versified by some unknown Bards, who had sufficient genius to distinguish and select the most valuable parts of such materials. This hypothesis is not new. The author of the *Galic Antiquities* remarks—

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\* *Galic Antiq.* p. 129.

“ Some have supposed, that a great number of the  
 “ Galic tales, which are in a language highly figura-  
 “ tive and poetical, though not confined to numbers,  
 “ have been the first essays in poetry, and long prior  
 “ to the æra of verse.” Very well: but what are  
 the sentiments of this very writer, who was much  
 in the secret of Ossian?—“ *This is not improbable,*  
 “ as the warmth of the uncultivated imagination,  
 “ and the barrenness of language, would naturally  
 “ give rise to all the figures of rhetoric, before art  
 “ could reduce words to measure or numbers.”\*  
 Is not this giving up the authenticity of Ossian, at  
 one stroke? For the tales of the Caledonians  
 cannot have been more ancient than their subject:  
 and, if the tales which relate to the actions of Fingal,  
*were long prior to the æra of verse*, it must follow,  
 that they could not have been *versified* by the son  
 of that hero.

I will not insist upon this, as I am inclined to  
 think, that verse, of some sort or other, was known  
 to the Caledonians, long before they knew any thing  
 of Ossian. At the same time, it must be remarked,  
 that the author of the poems, which go under this  
 name, regards the tales as of the higher antiquity.—  
 “ His words came only by halves to our ears; they  
 “ were dark, *as the tales of other times, before the*  
 “ *light of the song arose.*” And again, in the  
 beginning of *Oina-Morul*, where the personified

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\* Galic Antiq. p. 275.

Ossian professes to relate *his own expedition* to Scandinavia—"I seize the *tales* AS THEY PASS, and "*pour them forth in the song.*"

Let us now attend to the history of these *tales*, as recorded by the editors of Ossian, and let Mr. Macpherson be heard first.—"As I have mentioned "the traditional tales of the Highlanders, it may "not be improper here to give some account of "them. *After the expulsion of the Bards from "the houses of the chiefs* (that is, three generations "ago), they owed all their subsistence to the "generosity of the vulgar, whom they diverted "with repeating the compositions of their predecessors, and running up the genealogies of their "entertainers, to the family of their chiefs. As "this subject was, however, soon exhausted, they "were obliged to have recourse to invention, and "*form stories, having no foundation in fact*, which "were swallowed with great credulity by the "ignorant multitude. By frequent repeating, the "fable grew upon their hands, and as each threw "in whatever circumstances he thought conducive "to raise the admiration of his hearers, the story "became, at last, so devoid of all probability, that "even the vulgar themselves did not believe it. "They, however, liked the tales so well, that *the "Bards found their advantage in turning professed* "TALEMAKERS.—These *tales*, it is certain, *like "other romantic compositions*, have many things in "them, unnatural, and, consequently, disgusting to

“ true taste ; but I know not how it happens, they  
 “ command attention, more than any other fictions  
 “ I ever met with. The extreme length of these  
 “ pieces is very surprising, some of them requiring  
 “ many days to repeat them, but such hold they  
 “ take of the memory, that few circumstances are  
 “ ever omitted, by those who have received them,  
 “ only from oral tradition : what is still more amaz-  
 “ ing, the very language of the Bards is still  
 “ preserved.”\*

To this account of the tales, Mr. Smith fully subscribes, observing first of all,—“ That they take  
 “ the strongest hold of the memory and imagina-  
 “ tion ; insomuch that they are frequently to be  
 “ met with, *where the poems are beginning to be*  
 “ *rare.*”†

Such, then, are the traditional tales of the High-landers, which *some have supposed, with probability on their side*, to have been *long prior to verse!*—those tales, with the materials of which Mr. Smith stops up the gaps in his poems, and supplies a multitude of paragraphs ; and, by the aid of which, Mr. Macpherson obtains the complete story of most of the poems which he has published.—For the full confirmation of these facts, I appeal to these gentlemen’s introductions to the several poems, and to the notes throughout their volumes.

If there needs any stronger proof that Fingal and his heroes were the frequent theme of these *modern*,

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\* Note on Cath-Loda, Duan i.

† Galic Antiq. p. 129.

*unfounded talemakers*, that proof has already been given in the words of both editors. Wherever the poem exists, we always find a prose narrative, upon the same subject, orally repeated by the Highlander. The question is, which of the two must be accounted the original? If we believe the Bard, that honour pertains to the tales: for he says expressly, “I seize the tales, *as they pass*, and pour them forth in the song.”

But, for a more circumstantial solution of this question, let us compare one or two of the poems with the epitome of their appropriate tales. In the first note upon *Cath Loda*, the poem which opens Mr. Macpherson's collection, the editor remarks—“The abrupt manner in which the story of this poem begins, may render it obscure to some readers: it may not, therefore, be improper to give here the traditional preface, which is generally prefixed to it.” He then recites a circumstantial account of Fingal's visit to the Orkney Islands,—how, upon his return to his own dominions, a tempest forced him into a bay of Scandinavia, where he was met by his enemy, Starno, the king of that country, &c.—adding, in conclusion—“The *sequels* of the story may be learned from the poem itself.”

Here we may perceive, at one glance, that the tale is *complete in its kind*: it comprehends the whole subject of Fingal's expedition; whereas the poem only selects a few detached circumstances. The former is intelligible by itself; but the latter



could not be understood, and therefore could not have existed, without a reference to the prose narrative. The subject of this poem appears, therefore, to have been taken from the tale, in the same manner as the subject of a tragedy is derived from a volume of history.

Let us go on to the next piece—*Comala, a dramatic poem*. “Tradition, says the editor, has handed down the story *more complete* than it is in the poem —Comala, the daughter of Sarno, King of Inistore, fell in love with Fingal, at a feast to which her father had invited him, after his return from Lochlin, after the death of Agandecca. Her passion was so violent, that she followed him, disguised like a youth, who wanted to be employed in his wars. She was soon discovered by Hidallan, the son of Larmor, one of Fingal’s heroes, whose love she had slighted some time before. Her romantic passion and beauty recommended her so much to the king, that he had resolved to make her his wife, when news was brought him of Caracul’s expedition. He marched to stop the progress of the enemy, and Comala attended him. He left her in sight of Caracul’s army, when he himself went to battle, having previously promised, if he survived, to return that night.—*The sequel of the story may be gathered from the poem itself.*”

The story contained in the poem is short and simple. Comala and her attendant virgins are

anxiously waiting for the return of the hero. The jealous Hidallan brings news that he was slain in battle. The shock proves fatal to the lady. Fingal arrives, banishes Hidallan, and bewails the princess, whilst the Bards conclude with her elegy.

It must be an obvious remark, that this little drama, of itself, could not have preserved the history of Comala, of which it comprizes but a single incident. It furnishes no hint of the antecedent circumstances, without which the story is incomplete, and even unintelligible. But if we suppose the Bard and his audience to have been previously acquainted with the *traditional tale*, this little dramatic essay might have grown out of its materials, as naturally as Shakspeare's King Lear arose out of the romance of Geoffrey of Monmouth.

The same observation will apply to most of the poems of Ossian. And even Macpherson expresses himself, occasionally, as fully conscious of the fact. Thus, in his argument prefixed to *Darthula*:—  
“It may not be improper, here, to give the story, *which is the FOUNDATION of this poem*, as it is “handed down by tradition.” Upon a comparison of the *story* and the *poem* with each other, it will be sufficiently evident, that he has judged rightly. But, as this gentleman has not concealed his opinion of the *antiquity* and the *authenticity* of the traditional *tales*, how can he assert, that the poems *which have been founded upon them* are the genuine works of Ossian?

Again: in the argument prefixed to *Carthon*, after reciting the circumstances of a long tale, the editor adds,—“ *This story is the foundation of the* “ *present poem*, which opens on the night preceding “ the death of Carthon ; so that, what passes before, “ is introduced by way of episode.” But the episodes do not include all the circumstances of the tale, which is regarded as the foundation of the poem. Impressed with this idea, which, indeed, is obvious enough, Mr. Macpherson decides, occasionally, in favour of the traditional tale, and against the authority of his venerated Bard. We have an example of such decision, in a note upon the War of *Inisthona*.—“ Thus is the story delivered down “ by tradition, though the Poet, *to raise the charac-* “ *ter of his son*, makes Oscar himself propose the “ expedition.” And again, in a note on *Lathmon*,— “ It is said, by tradition, that it was the intelligence “ of Lathmon’s invasion that occasioned Fingal’s “ return from Ireland, though Ossian, *more poetic-* “ *ally*, attributes the cause of Fingal’s knowledge “ to his dream.”

Does not the critic, in these instances, imply, that the poet perverted the facts, which he had received from these traditional tales—from tales so *modern* and so *unfounded*! The poems were therefore derived from the tales. But what need is there of reasoning from inference? That many of the things ascribed to Ossian did actually originate in these

popular fictions, is a fact, which has been expressly and repeatedly acknowledged.

In some passages, already quoted from the notes on *Cath-Loda*, we are told, that the Highland tale-makers *never missed* to make additions to the works of Ossian—that they ascribed their own works to his venerable name—that they inserted incidents, and supplied deficiencies.\* In a note upon *Calthon and Colmal*, the editor speaks of a poem which is *generally ascribed to Ossian*; but some traditions mention it as *an imitation*, by some later Bard: and he leaves the question undecided.

Hence it appears, that Mr. Macpherson could not always distinguish between the supposed genuine productions of Ossian, and those of the modern Bards: and if this happened once, why may it not have happened in every instance?

The evidence of Mr. Smith substantiates the fact, that the poems ascribed to Ossian were thus contaminated.—In a note on the poem of *Gaul*, one of the best in his collection, he informs us,—“ It is still “ pretty well known; but the most common editions “ (oral rehearsals) of it, are a good deal adulterated, “ by the interpolations of the *Ur-sgeuls*, or *later tales*.” It is then an acknowledged fact, that much of the matter of these recent fabulous tales has been versified, and imposed upon the public, under the sanction of Ossian’s name.

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\* Let the reader examine Macpherson’s notes, beginning with those on *Cath-Loda*.

Mr. Macpherson, with full confidence in his own accomplishments as an editor, observes, relative to these talemakers,—“ Their interpolations are so “ easily distinguished, from the genuine remains of “ Ossian, that it took me very little time to mark “ them out, and totally to reject them.”\* His disciple, Mr. Smith, seems, in this respect, to have possessed all the dexterity of his master, as we may gather from his note, just now quoted, and from several passages, scattered throughout his volume.

These gentlemen had conceived a very exalted idea of the merits of Ossian; and therefore, they condemned, as modern interpolations, and expunged from his reputed works, every passage which appeared to them defective in beauty, dignity, regularity, or the marks of antiquity. But though they could distinguish the botches of mere poetasters; yet is it certain, that their sagacity would never have failed them, had a man of genius and taste equal to themselves, who lived after the revival of letters, condescended to handle the harp of Selma? We have just seen an instance to the contrary, where Mr. Macpherson’s judgment could not distinguish between the genuine works of his favourite Bard, and the labour of a modern imitator. Where then is the credential for the antiquity of any part of these poems? Shall we be referred to the old Highlanders, who repeated them? But

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\* Note on Cath-Loda, Duan iii.

they had received the fine heroic stanza, and the clumsy interpolation of the recent talemakers, with undistinguishing simplicity. To them the whole mass was equally ancient.—So far, I believe their error was not great.

It is strange that men of some abilities should have composed so much, under an assumed character. But such is the fact. It has been proved; and when facts shew themselves undisguised, however strange they may appear, there is no arguing against them.

Nor was this instance of self-denial peculiar to Scotland. The Irish poets, according to Mr. Macpherson's criticism, began to assume the character of Ossian, in the fifteenth century. Speaking of a futile poem, in a note upon *Cath-Loda*, he tells us—"It is something like those trivial compositions, " which the Irish Bards forged under the name of " Ossian, in the *fifteenth* and sixteenth centuries." And again, in his Dissertation on the poems,— " I have just now, in my hands, *all that remain* of " those compositions; but, unluckily for the anti- " quities of Ireland, they appear to be the work of " a very modern period. Every stanza, nay, almost " every line, affords striking proofs, *that they* " *cannot be three centuries old.*—It is matter of " wonder to me, how any one could dream of their " antiquity." To these Irish " forgeries" we may allow that portion of antiquity which Mr. Macpherson assigns to them; and, accordingly, they



betray something of the rudeness of the times; but had the practice of representing Ossian been continued to the eighteenth century, we should probably have discovered some efforts of a more accurate taste.

In Scotland, it was continued to the very middle of the eighteenth century. “ Within these thirty “ years (says Mr. Smith), one or two professed “ Galic poets have attempted it—one in Glendovan, “ Argyleshire; the other in Glenlochry, Perthshire. “ But they had only gone through a few stanzas, “ when they discovered, what every competent “ judge had discovered, before they had gone “ through so many lines, how unable they were to “ *support the character* which they *personated*. “ They immediately threw aside the *mask* which so “ ill fitted them, and never afterwards resumed it.”\*

These efforts of contemporary Bards, in different parts of the country, are sufficient to establish the fact, *that it was a practice in Scotland, within these sixty years, to compose originals for Ossian*—that only ten years before Mr. Macpherson’s translation appeared, the wits of Caledonia *personated the character* of the son of Fingal, and wrote Galic poems for him, *under a mask*. As men’s talents are not always commensurate with their ambition, we need not be surprized to find, that two of the Scotch poets were incompetent to support the

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\* Galic Antiq. p. 92.



assumed character, and wear the mask gracefully. But they had conceived the thing practicable, and their attempts were, undoubtedly, prompted by the more successful efforts of others. The subjects of such modern geniuses could have been supplied only from the traditional tales.

We have partly seen the use which the author of the *Galic Antiquities* made of these tales; but we have not seen the whole. He points out numerous paragraphs which he borrowed entirely from them, and worked up into the poems. This I had considered as referring only to the English translations, till I saw his *Sean Dana*, or *Galic originals*. There I mark those very paragraphs which are avowedly of his own composition, wrought into Galic verse, and forming one undistinguished mass, with his genuine originals. Here then is a Highland Bard, who has, *successfully*, composed in the character of Ossian, since the middle of the eighteenth century: who has put into the mouth of the prince of Selma the acknowledged fables of recent talemakers. After this, who will venture to assert, that the language and manner of the Caledonian Bard are not to be imitated in the present age?

In the recourse which he had to popular fiction, there can be no doubt that Mr. Smith followed the steps of the former editor, who speaks of *the tales*, however modern and groundless, as constituting *the foundation of the poems*—who publicly boasts, that *he could imitate what he has translated*, and that

he could *equal his original*. For all this, I give him credit; but it remains to be proved, that, from the beginning of the fourth, to the middle of the eighteenth century, no Caledonian genius had arisen, who could have equalled the blind Bard and his editor. Mr. Macpherson did not, surely, mean to assert, that Scotland never produced a poet, excepting *Ossian* and *himself*.

It being an avowed fact, that many modern Bards had attempted to versify these tales, and produce from them poems and episodes, in the name of Ossian; and that one, at least, of the Bard's editors has supplied whole paragraphs from these fictions, and exhibited in those very paragraphs, all the fire, all the pathos, the ancient manners, the peculiar phrases, and all the originality of Ossian; we may be permitted to ask—was it not practicable for a Highland Bard, of equal genius, in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, to exhibit in verse the most beautiful incidents of the same tales, in his own language, and with equal success?

And if the affirmative be granted, shall we not be furnished with a more probable account of the origin of those little detached pieces, *the whole of Ossian*, which the Highlanders repeated—of those songs and ballads, which were perfectly understood, and sung to popular tunes, thirty years ago, than that which is offered by the editor—that *they are the compositions of a Bard, who lived in the third century?*

Where the incidents and descriptions of these little poems and fragments were extravagant and absurd, the editors had a good opportunity of rejecting them, as modern forgeries; but I will again suppose, that the version had been made by men of equal taste and learning with the editors themselves; then, of course, the modern forgery would pass with them for the genuine strains of Ossian.

And that there were men of learning at a very recent period, who might have personated the character of the Bard of Selma, is fully evident. In the reign of Queen Ann, Edward Llwyd published his Dictionary, the first that had ever appeared for the venerable Galic. Upon this work, he received complimentary poems, written in the language, and the verse of Ossian, and by Scotch *clergyymen*, who must have had a better opportunity of studying the art of Homer and Virgil, and the rules of Aristotle, than what had fallen to the lot of the royal Bard.

And different Bards appear to have derived their theme from one common source, and to have exercised their talents upon the same incidents of the same identical tales. How can we otherwise account for the essential variations in the several *editions*, or oral repetitions of the poems, mentioned by Mr. Smith? These are not like the usual corruptions of copies, where a passage is reduced to absolute nonsense, by careless transcription, or imperfect repetition: but, though the lines be totally different, in the several recitals, yet the same main subject is

carried on in all of them, with equal clearness and beauty. Is not this sufficient proof, that the northern hemisphere has been illuminated by more than one Ossian?

The author of the *Galic Antiquities* shall explain my meaning—"In poems, chiefly depending on tradition, there must be, in different *editions*, a considerable variation. Their comparisons *frequently differ*; but they are always beautiful, and *have the same scope*. Thus, for instance, instead of the above simile, many have here another, of the same nature, taken from the strawberry."\* Each of the similes referred to, in this passage, runs out into a complete stanza of four lines: it is impossible that Ossian should have given them both; but such variations are just what we ought to expect, when several men of genius amuse themselves, by versifying and adorning the same incident of a popular tale.

That I may have an opportunity of remarking, what I consider as a general error, in the editors of these poems, I shall quote the remainder of the above note—"Such as may here miss the dialogue concerning *Cuach Fhionn*, or the medicinal cup of Fingal, will remember that it is of so different a complexion from the rest of the poem, that no apology needs to be made for rejecting it, as the interpolation of some later Bard." Thus we ob-

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\* *Galic Antiq.* p. 195. Note on *Dermid*.

serve that these gentlemen, whilst they themselves compose original paragraphs for Ossian, continually expunge, from the poems which came into their hands, every passage that is obscure, extravagant, or puerile, as *the interpolation* of modern times—of the ages of learning and accurate taste; and retaining all that is luminous, excellent, and agreeable to the best models and rules of the ancients, as the genuine production of a blind Caledonian of the third century. Is not this an absolute perversion of the canons of criticism? If there be *any thing ancient* in these poems, it must, surely, be those parts which correspond with the attainments of the age to which their production is ascribed, and with the taste of those ages through which they were transmitted, by oral tradition. But, I believe they contain very little that is older than the fictitious tales of the modern Highland Bards.

We have seen that the poems do not comprehend the whole subject of their respective *tales*, nor even so much of that subject as is necessary for the perspicuity of narration; but, on the contrary, the tales comprise the whole subject of the poems. We have remarked that the poems have been collected from oral tradition, only in detached episodes and fragments, while the tales, like written romances, go regularly, with an unbroken stream, through the whole field of adventure. And hence we have inferred, that *the tales must have constituted the foundation of the poems.*

We have heard Mr. Macpherson, in more than one instance, acknowledge this fact, in express terms: and we may add, that upon the very face of the poems themselves, the author describes his theme as, “A tale of the times of old—the deeds of the days of other years,” and declares it to be his province to “seize the tales as they pass, and pour them forth in the song.”

Upon the whole of this evidence, I conclude that, whatever may have been the origin of these romantic narratives, many of the poems owed their existence to them. From the name *Ur-sgeuls*, by which these stories are distinguished, Mr. Smith takes occasion to denominate them “Later Tales,” implying that, when compared with the poems, they are of recent composition. But besides that the tales are absolutely necessary to explain the poems, and connect their parts, it must be remarked, that the prefixed *Ur*, in the Galic language, implies not only *Fresh*, *New*, but also *Generous*, *Noble*, *Heroic*; so that *Ur-sgeul* may, with greater propriety, be rendered *Heroic tale*. Shaw translates the word, a *fable*, a *novel*, a *story*. That the Caledonian Bards regarded the *Sgeuls* as something more than recent fictions, is evident from the constant use they made of them, as well as from some of the most beautiful passages in the poems ascribed to Ossian. Thus, in the poem on the Death of Gaul, I find them placed at the top of a fine climax, as the kind of monument which would be most faithful to the



renown of that hero. The Bard, says the fame of Gaul, shall remain—

“Till this stone moulder into dust :

“Till this branching tree wither with age :

“Till this stream has ceased to run ;

“And the spring in the mountain has failed :

“Till the flood of time has swept away,

“Every Bard, every song, and every *pleasant tale*.”\*

But if these tales are not modern, when compared with the poems, their fabrication is, certainly, far more recent than the supposed æra of Ossian ; and more recent than his true æra, wherever that must be fixed. This fact appears from the glaring anachronisms which have slipped out of them into the poems. For we may collect from hence, that their fabricators ascribe, to the age of Fingal, every heroic action in which Caledonia was concerned, from the beginning of the third to the very close of the eleventh century.

Thus the first great achievement, recorded of that hero, was a victory in Scandinavia, over the formidable Starno.† He afterwards beat Caracalla, the son of Severus, in the year 211.‡ His grandson, Oscar, defeated Carausius, after the year 287.§ And after the death of Oscar, we shall find the same Fingal retain sufficient personal vigour to subdue Cathmor, the most mighty man of all Ireland, in single combat.|| The prowess of Fingal is not yet exhausted. He defeats the kings of Lochlin, who

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\* Galic Antiq. p. 170.

† Cath-Loda.

‡ Comala.

§ Caros.

|| Temora, B. viii.



invaded Ireland and Scotland, in the ninth and tenth century ;\* and finally, he kills Magnus, king of Norway, about the year 1103.†

Such evidence, of the most violent anachronism, appears upon the very face of the poems, and there needs no further proof that they originated from romantic tales, which had grown up in an age, when the æra of Fingal and Ossian was utterly unknown, and when the authors, like other fabricators of romance, could throw off all the shackles of chronology, and ascribe to a hero of fabulous antiquity, every splendid action of every remote age. I cannot, however, perfectly accord with Mr. Macpherson, when he ascribes the tales, in a mass, to the unfounded invention of the Highland Bards, *after their expulsion from the houses of the chiefs* : for it appears, from the concession of the same writer, that the Irish nation possessed tales of the same kind, in an age when the Scotch chiefs *had not discarded* their domestic Bards.

The reader has already perceived, in my numerous quotations from the *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, that there was an intimate connection between the fables of both countries. They agree even in their absurdities. The tales of the Irish, like those of the Scots, carry Fingal so far back as the third century ; yet, with the same inconsistency, which we remark in the sister country, they place him in the midst of

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\* Fingal---Battle of Lora.

† *Manos*, Galic Antiq. p. 251.

the Danish and Norwegian invasions, and bring him into the field to oppose the mighty Swaran, and the better known Magnus, in the commencement of the twelfth century. If the Highland tales make Ossian dispute with a Caldee, or one of the first propagators of Christianity, upon the subject of religion, the Irish, in like manner, confront him with their great apostle, St. Patrick. In short, the subjects of the poems and the tales are often identically the same on both sides of the channel, and the two countries seem only to disagree about the question of property, in the heroes and the Bard.\*

Had these tales possessed the essentials of authentic history, or even the appearance of history, it might be argued, that they were traditionally preserved, in both countries, from the very ages which they describe. But as they contain numerous anachronisms and absurdities, they must be the work of invention. And, as it cannot be affirmed, that the Bards of two distinct nations invented the same individual fiction, it becomes a question, whether the Scots or the Irish ought to have the credit of producing the originals.

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\* See Mr. Macpherson's account of the Irish poem, or Swaran's Invasion, or *Duan a Gharaibh Mac Starn*. This is upon the same subject as the poem of Fingal. *Cuthullin and Swaran*, upon the same subject. *Cath Gabhra*, or the Battle of Oscar and Cairbre; the subject of Temora. An Irish poem upon the subject of the Battle of Lora. Compare also, the giants, enchanted castles, dwarfs, palfreys, witches and magicians of the Irish, with the giants, enchanted castles, dwarfs, and palfreys of the Highlanders.

Notes on *Cath-Loda*, on *Temora*, B. i. and Diss. on the Poems of Ossian:

Could we ascertain, which country had the honour of giving birth to the hero and the bard, who have been the subject of so much fable, we might, perhaps, approach the solution of this problem.

Mr. Macpherson labours this point, with great PATRIOTIC zeal. Discovering in the collection of Irish poems, which lay before him, several allusions to modern times, and modern manners, he boldly pronounces the Irish Ossian to be a recent impostor, and positively asserts, that none of his reputed works are more than three hundred years old. All this may be literally true; but it would have come with a better grace from the pen of another critic. For we cannot forget, that this writer is perpetually offended with the same unfortunate allusions, in the reputed works of the Caledonian Ossian. But here, they are only *the interpolations of modern Bards*—the heterogeneous mass is thrown into the editorial crucible: the dross is consumed, and the pure gold comes forth, with undiminished weight and unalloyed brilliancy.

In a few passages in the Irish poems, the critic observes, that Fingal and his heroes are expressly conceded to the Caledonians; but it happens unluckily, that, in every passage which he adduces, in proof of the fact, the names of those worthies are in a Scottish, and not in the Irish orthography, as *Oscar* for *Osgur*, *Ossian* for *Oisin*, &c. When we recollect how much has been done, to support the claim of Caledonia, this minute circumstance may

lead to a suspicion, that Mr. Macpherson's copies had been prepared by a Highland *Senachy*, and compelled to give testimony, not only in opposition to the general opinion of the Irish nation; but contrary to the intention of the Bards who composed these very poems.

Could we with certainty develope the true history of Fingal, it might, probably, be easy to trace the progress of the tales. But fable has covered that history with impenetrable shades. It would be no easy matter to ascertain his real actions, his rank, his country, or the age in which he lived: but to account for the popular traditions and poems, on the subject of his exploits, which equally pervade Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland, would be no less difficult, were we to deny that such a hero did exist in some age and country, and that he rendered himself famous in his day. We may therefore grant the reality of such a character: but where shall we next tread?

The Irish claim him as their countryman, and as president of the knights of Leinster. The Scots, on the contrary, affirm that he was a king of Morven, in the Western Highlands, who reflected a beam of unrivalled splendour on the history of Caledonia, in the third century. But so little are the traditions of either country connected with authentic annals, that, as we have already seen, they uniformly extend his martial achievements through the transactions of eight centuries.

Here must be fable on both sides: and I again repeat it, though the historians of Ireland and Scotland might have equally recorded authentic facts, the concordant incidents of palpable fable must have been propagated, from one country to the other. In the present instance, who are to be deemed the plagiaries—the Irish or the Scots? This question has been warmly debated, by the antiquaries of both nations; but as yet, it does not appear to have been fully decided, to the satisfaction of the public. I cannot expect that my inquiries will produce a final decision: yet, as I wish to rest upon some opinion, I shall, for the present, quit the subject of Fingal's history, which is either too dark to admit of elucidation, or else, wilfully obscured by national prepossession; and seek for some ray of light from collateral circumstances. Here, I think, the evidence is not wholly to the prejudice of Ireland.

In point of public testimony, the Irish have clearly the advantage. Had it been asked, only sixty years ago—*Who were the Fenii*; the unequivocal answer would have been, that they were *the ancient militia of Ireland*. At that recent period, the claim of the Highlanders was unknown to any but themselves. When Mr. Macpherson was preparing his first publication, the Irish had no conception of the existence of any poems of Ossian, but those which belonged to their own nation. Hence the

advertisement in Falkener's Dublin Journal, of Dec. 1st, 1761.\*

Mr. Smith, having quoted Mr. Macpherson's account of the Highland tales, adds the following remark—"Sir William Temple, who may be less "suspected of partiality, has, long ago, given the "*very same account of Irish tales.*"† The poetic tales of the Irish had, then, attracted the notice of Sir William Temple: and, though I have not, at present, an opportunity of citing the passage, I have seen some honourable mention of such narratives, in a treatise of the poet Spenser.

And long before the time of this poet's residence in Ireland, Mr. Good, a priest and school-master at Limerick, about the year 1566, thus speaks of the Irish people:—"They think the souls of the "deceased are in company with the famous men of "*those places, concerning whom they retain many "stories and sonnets, as of the giants Fion Mac "Hoyle, and Oshin (l. Osgur) Mac Oshin, and are "so far deluded as to think they often see them.*"‡

Notwithstanding this writer's erroneous orthography of Irish names, there can be no doubt relative to the identity of the personages intended in this paragraph. It is then a fact, that the Irish people, as long ago as the middle of the sixteenth century, and, in the remotest corner from the shores of Scotland,

\* Quoted at full length, in the Diss. on the Poems.

† Galic Antiq. p. 127, with a reference to Temple's Miscel. v. ii. p. 341.

‡ See Gibson's Camden, 2d edit. Col. 14, 21.



entertained a *general* and *inveterate* opinion, that Fingal, Ossian, and Oscar, were ancient heroes of their own country—that the tales and poems of the Irish, concerning the actions of these worthies, were not at that period, regarded as recent compositions, but as retained from remote times; and that the very same mythology, respecting the souls of the dead, which appears in every page of the Galic poems, was, at that time, deeply rooted in the imagination of the Irish populace, as the remains of an ancient superstition.

The claim, therefore, which the Irish nation have preferred to Fingal and Ossian, and their tales and poems, respecting their achievements, are not of so *very recent* an origin as the editor of the Galic Bard is pleased to represent them. The long narrative poems may be modern; but the Irish had their ancient *war odes*, which were certainly old enough, to cover all the traditions which the Highlanders have hitherto produced.

Let us hear what those traditions are.—Mr. Macpherson tells us, that some of the allusions to ancient history, which are found in Ossian's poems, have been mentioned three hundred years ago.\* But he quotes no author; he descends to no particulars; nor does he say, whether such *mention* has been made in Scotland or in Ireland. Dr. Blair had heard of some manuscripts and traditions, *two*

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\* Diss. on the æra of Ossian.



or *three* centuries old, which mentioned something of Ossian.\* But what the manuscripts were, or what the traditions said of him, we have not been told. Mr. Smith states it, as a notorious fact, that *many* poems, ascribed to Ossian, have been known in the Highlands for *some ages* back; old men have heard them repeated by their fathers and grandfathers.† Not one of these poems is named. And this gentleman cannot have forgotten, that the Highlanders repeated the *interpolations* of *yesterday*, as genuine relics of antiquity. We are again told, that a *few* manuscripts are still to be found, in which several of these poems have a place—that a *few*, in an old copy on vellum, are in the hands of Capt. Mac Lachlan, and a *few* less ancient manuscripts, of *some* of the poems, are in the hands of several.‡

This is, altogether, a very reserved kind of evidence. Why do these writers avoid particulars? Why not identify their authorities? Why not give us the precise contents of their oldest manuscripts, or a faithful copy of some one of these poems, out of either of them? It has not been proved, that these manuscripts and traditions, whatever they may be, originally belonged to Scotland; and the contrary is very probable, as Mr. Shaw declares, in the introduction to his grammar, that the few books which he found in the Highlands, and few, indeed, they were, turned out to be either Irish, or

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\* Critical Diss.

† Galic Antiq. p. 93.

‡ Ib. p. 94. 95, *Note*.

else, written in the present age, and in imitation of the Irish dialect.

Whatever these manuscripts and traditions may have been, it has not been proved that they vouch for the *whole* of the poems of Ossian, or for *a single specified piece*, or *a single paragraph*, as it appears in the present collections. It is probable, that they only answer for something composed in Irish, *which was always the written and the studied language*,\* even of the Highlanders themselves; or else, that they contain something more analogous to the state of Galic poetry, as it was two or three centuries ago.

But allowing this evidence its full weight, what does it amount to? The Highlanders have vouchers, two or three hundred years old, for some fragments of poems, ascribed to Ossian. Such a scale will not reach the beginning of the fourth century. For two or three hundred years, they may have had Irish poems, imitations of Irish poems, traditional tales, borrowed from the Irish, and new modelled by themselves, or versifications of such tales. It does not appear from hence, whether they had, or had not, retained some vague rumours of Fingal and his heroes, floating in the mouths of the populace, from the very age in which those warriors lived.

But the absolute antiquity of the Irish tales is not the point I would now insist upon. Let it suffice, to prove their comparative publicity, and to shew,

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\* Shaw's Introd. to the Galic Dict.

that they were old enough to cover all the evidence which has been produced, of Highland tradition. Their attraction was felt, some centuries ago, and they were rendered accessible to strangers, who were not conversant in the Irish language. If they were, thus early, communicated to Englishmen, how easy must their communication have been to those Caledonians, who visited Ireland, and who spoke the very language in which they were written or recited? or, if this mode of communication would have been too slow in its operation, I need not multiply authorities to prove, that, till within a very recent period, those Caledonians, who wished to become *Celtic* readers, used Irish books alone, and Irish masters. Did not these teachers carry with them something of the taste of their own nation? Did they not detail, in every corner of the Highlands, and to admiring audiences, those heroic narratives which had constituted the delight of their own youthful years? Did they not also carry with them Irish books, wherein some of these tales were committed to writing? It is probable they did. Irish books upon these subjects have been found in the Highlands, and in the Isles of Scotland; but who has heard of a Highland manuscript having been discovered in Ireland? The contrary supposition, therefore, that the Irish could have furnished their libraries, with ancient copies upon vellum, for such they possess, from the unheard of tales of Scotland, is highly absurd.

And such was the obscurity of these tales, that they appear to have been utterly unknown, or totally neglected, where we should, most of all, have expected to find some account of them. When Edward Llwyd travelled through Ireland and Scotland, about a century ago, to collect all the information he could procure, respecting the language and literature of those countries, he opened, at the same time, an extensive correspondence, with the learned inhabitants, in order to assist his inquiries: he also forwarded copies of his printed sheets into Scotland and Ireland, before he had finally closed his work; whence the numerous articles of addenda to his dictionary, which he procured from both these countries: yet we do not find that he obtained a single hint, relative to the Highland Ossian, or any of his family. In his catalogue of Irish manuscripts, this writer speaks of the *Fenii*, or heroes of Fingal, as the ancient militia of *Ireland*: and, had a different opinion *then* prevailed in the Highlands, he was in the way to have been set right: for he received poetical compliments on his dictionary, from no fewer than seven Caledonian Bards, who could not have so far neglected the honour of their country, as to have overlooked such a circumstance.

Llwyd produces a respectable, though, by no means, a complete list of Irish manuscripts, in which several poems upon the *Fenii* may be remarked.\* But while

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\* Thus, in the Earl of Clarendon's MSS. *Finleachi O Catalai Gigantomachia*, vel potius acta *Finni Mac Cuil*, cum prælio de Fintra, *Hibernice*.

the libraries of Ireland abounded with manuscripts of poems, upon these heroes, the antiquaries of Scotland did not enable the collector to record the name of a single Caledonian manuscript, upon this, or any other subject.

Nor, since the question of <sup>our</sup> Ossian has been agitated, do I find, that the public attention has been directed to a single existing copy of the venerable Bard, in either of the Scotch colleges, or in the libraries of those families, who had for so many ages patronized the Highland *Senachies*. Instead of this, we have been presented, since the æra of Mr. Macpherson's publication, with a multitude of learned dissertations upon the subject; but the public had called for evidence, not for argument.

That the numberless accounts of the Fenii, which the Irish nation possesses, whether in the form of chronicles, poems, or popular tales, have more of the character of extravagant romance, than of sober history, is a point which I am ready to concede to the editors of Ossian; but still, I contend for their comparative publicity. They have, for many ages, taken deep root in popular tradition: they have employed a multitude of pens: they have obtained a firm establishment in national opinion: and, for

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Colloquia quædam de rebus Hibernicis, in quibus colloquentes introducuntur S. Patricius, Coillins et OSSENIUS.

Again: amongst the MSS. of Arthur Brownlow, Esq.---Cath Mhuileana, or the Battle of Muilena, a Romance.---Cath Comhar, Cath Gabhra, Cath Code, Cath Atha Bo, Cath Ollarba,---Battles fought by the *Fion Erion*, or ancient militia of Ireland, and *Fion Mac Cual*, their great commander.

some centuries, have been distinctly remarked, by those curious strangers who visited the country, and observed upon the manners of its inhabitants. But, on the other hand, the Highland traditions upon the subject of Ossian, if such have existed for any length of time, have been as remarkable for their obscurity, as the others have been for their publicity. Prior to the age of Macpherson, what Englishman has mentioned them, and in what manner? Amongst all the learned members of the Scotch universities, and all the brilliant and patriotic writers of that country, what man, before the middle of the eighteenth century, has gratified the public with a single paragraph, upon a subject so curious and interesting? Where was Ossian with his songs of fame, in the days of the great poet and historian *Buchanan*? Has he named the royal Bard, or imitated a single stanza of his fanciful poems? Since the reformation, many of the clergy, who instruct the Caledonians in their native language, have been educated in the universities of Scotland: they have had their taste formed by the study of the ancients; and they are, generally, qualified to speak and write in English. In the course of two centuries, has not an individual been found amongst them, of sufficient discernment and taste, to perceive the beauties of the *Fingal*, the *Temora*, the *Carthon*, the *Berrathon*, &c. which he is supposed to have continually heard, in his own family, and in the families of his congregation?



Some of the descriptive poets, who have written in Scotland, must have understood Galic, or, at least, must have conversed with those who did understand it. Is the Highlander of a character so very dissimilar from that of his Hibernian brother as, studiously, to have drawn an impenetrable veil of concealment over the charms of his native muse: or, is it probable that her attractions would be absolutely contemned by the Lowland Bard? Surely not: yet who has imitated, or even named a single episode of the Homer of the North, before the eighteenth century?

I have, indeed, heard of certain *allusions* to him, in songs, which are ascribed to names of some antiquity; but these songs have only been collected out of the mouths of the people, within these fifty years. What kind of authority can they constitute? The English peasant may suppose that his songs of Robin Hood were made by the man who made the rest of the *Canterbury tales*: but few editors would deem his opinion a sufficient ground for adding another volume to Chaucer.—After all, what are these *allusions*? Should we not have had them fully displayed, if they were at all to the purpose?

It must be remembered, that the poems of Ossian, when discovered by our editors, were not become obsolete from their antiquity. They were still the familiar companions of the cheerful fire-side. Notwithstanding this, before the days of those gentlemen, they were absolutely unknown to strangers—



unknown, and unheard of, in a great part of Scotland itself: and being thus obscure, it is impossible to suppose, that they should have diffused their influence over the extensive territory of Ireland, and furnished the general topic of national tradition—the general theme of poetry and romance, for several successive ages. Had they been at all known to the Irish, who are a lettered people, we should have discovered copies of some of them amongst the collections of Irish manuscripts; but no such thing has been found.

In both countries, the character of almost every individual, in the Finian family, is drawn exactly alike, excepting that the Hibernian heroes are of rather a more gigantic stature. The story of their actions is, for the most part, precisely the same. In both countries, the design of the picture is one; it differs only in the style of colouring. And, as the Highlander cannot make out his claim to the original, he ought to acquiesce in the reputation of an elegant copyist.

Much has been said of the peculiar stability of the Erse language. How can that stability be proved, without the evidence of ancient books? Who can affirm, that the unwritten Erse, which we catch only from the lip of the present generation, has remained more fixed than the Irish, which, for many centuries, has been written, without much attention to modern refinement, as to its structure and vocabulary, and upon the model of its own

ancient compositions? The probability is against such an hypothesis. Yet the Irish poems, though confessedly far below the date of the fourth century, are preserved only in manuscript; are known only to the laborious antiquary, and, by him, understood with difficulty, whilst the Scotch poems are the trivial songs of the illiterate peasant, in the reign of *George the Third*. Shall history, shall common sense, shall nature itself reverse its course, in favour of the Bard of Selma!

I may remark another strong circumstance in support of the originality of the Irish tales. The Ossian of Ireland, during his uphill progress, along the high-road of romance, and before he had reached the *third* century, made a long halt, at the age of St. Patrick, in the middle of the *fifth*. Whilst he was lingering at this stage, the Irish talemakers took an opportunity of marrying the Bard's daughter to their patron saint.\* The abode of Ossian at the house of his son-in-law, and his occasional disputes with him, upon the subject of religion, were things which followed of course. But the Scotch senachies, without any such pretext of family connection, make their Ossian associate with one of the *Culdees*, or first propagators of Christianity, address several of his poems to him, and dispute with him, in the very style of his Hibernian namesake. They had received the Bard as an *atheistical caviller*, and they could

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\* See Mr. Macpherson's Diss. on the *Poems*.

not innovate upon his character. This is a clear proof, if all other were wanting, that the poets and talemakers of Scotland have imitated Irish fable, and consequently, that they are posterior, in time, to the Irish Bards who personated the venerable Ossian.

These are the principal reasons, upon which I conclude that, where the Highland tales agree with the Irish, they are, uniformly, borrowed from them. At the same time, I admit the probability that the Highlanders produced some tales of their own, in imitation of the others, and in the manner described by Mr. Macpherson. Amongst those which seem to claim this original, I would distinguish the narratives of victories obtained in Scandinavia, by *Trenmor, Fingal, Ossian, Oscar*, &c.; achievements which have no other support, in history, or in romance. As for the *poems themselves*, excepting, perhaps, a few short fragments, they were produced in very recent times, either from this aggregate of Irish and Scotch tales, or by a direct imitation of Irish poems.

The introduction of the Irish tales into Scotland, must have been greatly facilitated, by the intercourse which history acknowledges to have subsisted between the two nations—by their connection of blood—their similarity of manners and opinions, and the absolute identity of their language: for the Irish and the Erse are so completely one, that, to this very day, the same vocabulary serves both dialects:

and, before the year 1778,\* the Highlander had no grammar but that of his Hibernian brother. He had been hitherto content to regard his native dialect as only a *patois* of the venerable Irish. The kind reception of the same tales must also have been secured by the interest which the Irish themselves have granted to the Caledonians, both in the actions and in the family connections of their heroes.

For the original invention of this mass of romance, *the tales in general*, I can account only by supposing, that such heroes as Fingal and his worthies did actually exist. But in what age? Here I feel myself, again, carried by the current, towards that dangerous rock, the history of Fingal—of a hero, whose brilliant exploits illuminate the plains of Erin and the mountains of Albania, for the space of nine centuries. If, instead of snatching the golden prize, I return with the emblems of shipwreck, I hope the indulgent reader, aware of my perilous adventure, will commiserate my misfortune.

From the vast heap of confusion which lies before me, I would select some grand, prominent point of the story, which may assimilate to some well known and authentic events: and, from that point, I would observe the bearings and distances of the irregular projections. But as I must not venture rashly upon an enterprize of such hazard, let me, first of all, consider the incidents selected by Mr. Macpherson,

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\* There may be a trifling error in this date, as I observe my copy of Shaw's grammar is of the *Second Edition*.

for the purpose of fixing the æra of Fingal in the third century.

*Caracul*, mentioned in the poem of *Comala*, was *Caracalla*, the son of Severus; and the chief with whom Oscar fought, in the war of *Caros*, was the usurper *Carausius*. It may be admitted, that the fabricator of these particular tales, intended that *Caracul* and *Caros* should be so understood: but their adventures occur only in two of the shortest and most isolated of all the poems. But the great mass of tradition places Fingal in the midst of the struggle, between the inhabitants of Ireland and the Hebrides, and the invading Danes and Norwegians. Of this I shall speak presently, when I shall have examined whether Mr. Macpherson's scheme appears competent to support its own weight.

Starno, king of Lochlin or Scandinavia, invaded Scotland. Fingal took him prisoner, and afterwards released him, and sent him home. The resentful king laid a snare for the life of the hero. He sent a Bard to Selma, to invite him to Lochlin, for the pretended purpose of marrying his daughter. Fingal went to Lochlin, and, with his small retinue of heroes, obtained two victories over the forces of the treacherous Starno, and returned triumphant to Morven.\* In the next place, we hear of the same Fingal's visit to the king of one of the Orkney Islands, probably the same who is mentioned in the

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\* Fingal, B. iii. and Notes *ibid*.

tale of Cath-Loda. He is again driven by a storm into Scandinavia, and has another victorious conflict with the gloomy Starno.\* Our hero was still young; but after all these martial and maritime adventures, it might be thought his age amounted, at least, to five-and-twenty; however, in compassion to our author's scheme, I shall compute it only at *twenty* years. Upon his return to his own dominions, our hero hears of the northern expedition of Caracalla, whom he expels from Caledonia in the year 211.† Fingal's age was now *twenty-one*. About the year 287, Oscar, our hero's grandson, beats Carausius:‡ and after a number of intervening adventures, in *Scotland, South Britain, Scandinavia, and Ireland*, which must have taken up seven years more, the same Oscar falls by the hand of Caribar, and his death is revenged by Fingal, who, in single combat, and by the exertion of personal valour, kills Cathmor, the most accomplished hero of all Ireland.§ Fingal, at the time of this engagement, must have seen his hundred and fourth year. The renowned veteran had borne his age well!

But as the hero's years, at the æra of this exploit, might seem objectionable to *some readers*, the editor has here presented to our view a different scale.—  
 “ Before I finish my notes, he tells us, it may not  
 “ be altogether improper, to obviate an objection,  
 “ which may be made to the credibility of the

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\* See Comala, and Notes.

† Comala, and Diss. on the Æra.

‡ War of Caros, and Diss. on the Æra.

§ Temora, B. i, and viii.



“ story of Temora. It may be asked, whether it is  
 “ probable that Fingal could perform such actions  
 “ as are ascribed to him in this book, at an age  
 “ when his grandson, Oscar, had acquired so much  
 “ reputation in arms? To this it may be answered,  
 “ that Fingal was but very young (Book 4) when he  
 “ took to wife Ros-crana,\* who, soon after, became  
 “ the mother of Ossian. Ossian was also extremely  
 “ young, when he married Ever-Allin, the mother  
 “ of Oscar. Tradition relates, that Fingal was but  
 “ eighteen years old at the birth of his son Ossian;  
 “ and that Ossian was much about the same age,  
 “ when Oscar, his son, was born. Oscar, perhaps,  
 “ might be about twenty, when he was killed in the  
 “ battle of Gabhra (Book 1); so the age of Fingal,  
 “ when the decisive battle was fought between him  
 “ and Cathmor, was just fifty-six years.”† How is  
 all this to be reconciled with the other computation?  
 The author forgets the achievements of Fingal, pre-  
 vious to his battle with Caracalla, in the year 211,  
 and the interval of 76 years, between that action and  
 Oscar’s engagement with Carausius, not to mention  
 the subsequent adventures of the same Oscar. If  
 the tradition mentioned in this note, be given up as

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\* Miss Drooke, when obstructed by similar difficulties, observes, that the Irish poets represent *Finn* as extremely young when he married. The note concludes thus: “Our magical Bard conjures up such delightful enchantments, that our attention should be too much engrossed by the grace and grandeur of his images, to count the knots upon his poetical wand.” *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, p. 101.

† Concluding note on Temora.



fabulous, *it can obviate no objection* to the credibility of the story of Temora; if it be admitted as authentic, the former actions ascribed to the hero must be matter of pure fiction. Caracul *was not* Caracalla, Caros *was not* Carausius, the whole *dissertation concerning the æra of Ossian* falls to the ground, and the age of Fingal floats at large, upon the ocean of time. We must, therefore, keep fast hold of *Caracalla* and *Carausius*, and see how the computation of the æra will affect our heroes, when combined with the *tradition* which is calculated to *obviate objections*.

At the battle of Gabhra, Fingal was one hundred and four years of age, Ossian *eighty-six*, Oscar *sixty-eight*, and Malvina *about the age of Oscar*. That romantic traditions, when brought to the test of chronology, should exhibit such absurdities, is not at all extraordinary; but it is extraordinary, that men of learning and sound sense, when they would dignify such romances with the name of history, should forget, in one page, what they had written in another.

Let us, in the next place, consider the age of the Bard when he composed his poems, which was, we are informed, *after the Christian refugees had betaken themselves to the caves and rocks of the Highlands*, in consequence of the persecution under Dioclesian, which began in the year 303.\* We may

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\* See Diss. on the Æra.

allow three years more for the persecution to reach the extremities of the British province, to establish the “ dwellers of the rock ” in their dreary abode, and to introduce the Bard to their society. We thus arrive at the year 306. Ossian was now ninety-eight years of age, and Malvina *eighty*.

At these years the son of Fingal began to dictate the three volumes of admirable poems, which have been published by Mr. Macpherson and Mr. Smith, exclusive of the *more considerable* part of his works, which is unfortunately lost. The lady, at the same time, was still an exquisite performer on the harp ; her memory was so perfect, that she could retain poems of *four hundred* or *four thousand* lines, from a single rehearsal, and transmit them faithfully to posterity, by oral tradition. She was still *young*, still *beautiful*—“ *a fair beam of light, and the lovely huntress of Lutha !* ”

All this appears to me so utterly improbable, that I cannot help acceding to the sentiments of Mr. Macpherson himself, at the close of his elaborate dissertation, after he had fixed, and unfixed, and fixed again, the æra of Ossian. “ What is advanced “ in this short dissertation, it must be confessed, is “ mere conjecture. Beyond the reach of records, “ is a settled gloom, into which no ingenuity can “ penetrate.”\*

In one point, however, I am still of the writer’s former opinion.—“ The Caracul of Fingal is no other

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\* See Diss. on the Æra.

“ than Caracalla, who, as the son of Severus, the  
“ emperor of Rome, whose dominions were ex-  
“ tended almost over the known world, was, not  
“ without reason, called *the son of the king of the*  
“ *world.*”\* This I admit. But what had Fingal  
to do with the age of Caracalla?

I would offer the following conjecture, as an answer to this question. Though the Scots may have retained some popular rumours of their own, upon the subject of Fingal's actions; yet it is evident, that they received the greatest part of their tales directly from Ireland. The Irish had a tradition, that this hero lived in the days of one of their kings, named *Cormac*. Their fabulous annalists, eager to admit all his romantic adventures, as real facts, having no room for one half of those adventures in modern times, and being quite at liberty from the shackles of authentic records, carried him back to the age of an imaginary *Cormac*, in the third century. The talemakers of Scotland, having received Fingal from their hands, as an accredited character of the third century, and having heard something also, of the expeditions of Caracalla and Carausius, which coincided with that age, had a fair opportunity of confronting the heroes of Morven with those Roman generals. But the main stream of tradition takes a different channel.

Throughout the great mass of romances and poems, whether Scotch or Irish, we find Fingal and

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\* See Diss. on the *Æra*.

his worthies contending with the men of Lochlin, that is, Denmark or Norway. These encroachers are here represented as not in search of plunder only, but of foreign settlements: emerging from the character of mere pirates, they were beginning to aspire to that of conquerors. Already in possession of the Orkney Islands, and the western Islands of Scotland, they were now meditating the subjugation of the whole kingdom of Ireland. Swaran, their warlike king, made a descent for that very purpose; but he was successfully opposed by the victorious Fingal: and the warriors of Lochlin did not accomplish their design, before the age of those "little men" who came immediately after that famous commander.

If we look into authentic history, for a period which corresponds with this description, we shall find it only in the long reign of Harold Harfager, or between the years 870 and 931. The former part of this period coincides with the reign of the celebrated Alfred, by whose prowess, vigilance, and sound policy, the encroachments of the northern men, in South Britain, were effectually checked: and by whose example or influence, the Irish and Scots may have been induced to keep up a body of disciplined troops, for the protection of their own coasts.

With this idea, the *office* of the Fenii, as understood by the Irish, perfectly accords. It is thus

alluded to in *The Chase*, a poem ascribed to Ossian, and published by Miss Brooke—

“ O Inisfail! thy Oisín goes  
 “ To guard thy ports no more,  
 “ To pay with death the foreign foes  
 “ Who dare insult thy shore!”

Upon this passage the editress has the following note—“ Dr. Hanmer, in his chronicle, gives us a  
 “ long list of the chieftains, under the command of  
 “ Finn Mac Cumal, who were particularly appointed  
 “ to the care of the harbours of Ireland; at the end  
 “ of which, he adds—These were the chiefe com-  
 “ manders, by direction from Finn Mc Koyll, who  
 “ tooke further order, that beacons should be set up  
 “ in sundrie places of the land, where, in time of  
 “ danger, they might have direction for reliefe, and  
 “ to draw to head for their defence.”\*

The great invasion of Ireland, in the days of Fingal, was that under *Swaran*; in Irish tradition, *Gara*’ or *Garaidh*, who was, probably, no other than Harold himself. For it is a fact well known, that, in the former part of this king’s reign, the Norwegians settled in several of the Scottish Islands. One of the editors of Ossian allows, that, in the year 875, Harold entirely conquered the Hebrides. And if I may presume to quote an old Welsh writer, in such company, we are further told, in the life of Gruffudd ap Cynan, a narrative compiled in the time of King Stephen, that Harold Harfager undertook two sepa-

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\* Reliques of Irish Poetry, p. 82.

rate expeditions against Ireland; in the former of which, he committed some depredations, and in the latter, founded a kingdom.

After mentioning Harold Harfager, and two of his brothers, or relations, the narrative thus proceeds:—  
 “ And be it known, that the three brothers, already  
 “ named, went to sea with a royal navy, in search of  
 “ military adventure, and at last they all arrived in  
 “ Ireland. Harold Harfager had already, before  
 “ this, gone, with a mighty host, and cruised round  
 “ all Ireland, and cruelly slain her inhabitants, and  
 “ robbed them, and made incursions through the  
 “ country; and he built (or repaired) the city of  
 “ Dublin, and many other cities, and castles, and  
 “ fortresses, and fortified and settled the boundaries  
 “ of his kingdom. And one of his brothers did he  
 “ place in one of the cities which he built, and which  
 “ is called in their language, *Port-Larg* (Waterford),  
 “ and his heirs have been kings of the same city,  
 “ from that time to *the present day*.”\*

I have not met with much detailed account of the kingdom which Harold founded in Ireland, and of the history of his successors, in that dominion; but the notices which we have upon this subject, in the respectable chronicle of Caradoc of Llancarvan,† and other Welsh annals, are sufficient to establish

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\* Welsh Archaiol. v. ii. p. 585.

† Notwithstanding many accidental and trivial errors in these annals, their *general* authenticity is evident in every page, so that they deserve the attention of the historian of every part of the British islands.



the reality of the events here recorded: I shall, therefore, quote a few of them.

Between the years 910 and 920, Ireland and Mona were desolated by the men of Dublin.\* These appear to have been the new settlers of that city. About the time when Howel Dda went to Rome, A. D. 933, Awlaff (Olave) lands in Wales from Ireland, with a host of *Northmen*, and another *Gwyddyl* (Native Irish)—he returns to Ireland, where he is made king.† A. D. 940, Abloyc, king of Ireland, died.‡ A. D. 961, the sons of Abloyc, king of Ireland, came to Caer Gybi (Holy Head), which they utterly destroyed, and took the shrine of Cybi with them into Ireland, where it remained a hundred years. They afterwards marched into Leinster, which they wasted dreadfully.§ A. D. 988, Clumayn, the son of Abloyc, was slain.|| A. D. 999, the Scots (that is, the native Irish), wasted Dublin.¶ A. D. 1010, 1013, Brian, king of all Ireland, Murchath, his son, and a multitude of other kings, assaulted Dublin, where Sitruc, the son of Abloyc, was king. The men of Leinster, and their king, Mael Mordav, took arms to oppose Brian. Sitruc hired a fleet of long ships of war, manned with loricated warriors, and commanded by a chief, named *Taradyr*, or *Brodyr*, to engage with Brian. In a battle, which was destructive to both parties, Brian and his son were slain on the one part, and

\* W. Archæol. v. ii. p. 393.

† Ibid. p. 426.

‡ Ibid. p. 487.

§ Ibid. p. 491.

|| Ibid. p. 498.

¶ Ibid. p. 499.



the commander of the fleet, and Mael Mordav, on the other.\* About seven years after this, we find another Awlaff landing in Wales, with a host of Northmen and Irish.†

The age of Fingal does not seem to fall in with this period of Norwegian sway in Ireland. We must, therefore, go back to the time when the Island was only threatened with the tyranny of the *Northmen*.

The first, or predatory invasion of Harold, mentioned by Gruffudd's biographer, I suppose to be the same which is celebrated in the poem of Fingal: and I would offer some conjecture respecting the date, collected from a singular incident, recorded by Caradoc, and by all the Welsh annalists.

“ In the year of Christ 893, the Northern pagans  
“ came into Wales—and, in the summer of that  
“ year, certain vermin, of an unknown species, were  
“ seen in Ireland. They resembled moles in their  
“ shape, and each of them was furnished with two  
“ long teeth. They destroyed all the corn and  
“ grass land, wherever they went, devouring the  
“ root of every herb and plant, so as to produce a  
“ famine in the country. It is supposed they were  
“ brought thither by the *pagans*, who also at-  
“ tempted to introduce them into Britain. In order  
“ to be delivered from these pests, the inhabitants  
“ offered up prayers to God, gave alms to men, and  
“ corrected the errors of their lives: and God sent

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\* W. Archaiol. p. 395, 502.

† Ibid. p. 502, 504.

“a frost before the end of the summer, which  
“destroyed all these vermin.”\*

The animals thus described could have been no other than a species of rats, which sometimes do great mischief in the North of Europe, though they could not live long in the air of Ireland, which is peculiarly pernicious to several kinds of vermin. The æra of their appearance must have coincided with the arrival of their pagan conductors, who, undoubtedly, contributed their share in producing the famine. These creatures had been hitherto unknown in the country. The fleets of Norway could not, therefore, have appeared much on the coasts before this time. But as Harold now cruised quite round the whole Island, and made descents upon all the coasts, these new visitors were generally introduced, so as to give the inhabitants, who viewed them in a portentous light, occasion to represent them as the authors of a public calamity. This may be deemed a trivial circumstance to bring forwards, for the purpose of ascertaining the age of a Fingal. I avail myself of it, however, as a confirmation of the point which I principally insist upon; that the story of Fingal, generally considered, corresponds with the history of those times, and of those times only.

In the days of that hero, the Norwegians were endeavouring to establish themselves in Ireland.

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\* W. Archaiol, p. 483.

By his valour and vigilance—by *setting up beacons in sundrie places of the land, where, in time of danger, they might have direction for relieve*,—their efforts were baffled, for a time; but when Fingal was no more, the race of little, *or subjugated men*, immediately succeeded. Agreeably to this, we are told, that Harold, in a second attempt, did establish a kingdom in Ireland, and, according to the narrative already quoted, left it to his descendants, *Auloedd, Sutric, Afloedd, Sutric, Afloedd*, the maternal ancestors of Gruffudd ab Cynan.\* I have already shewn that Caradoc's chronicle has many notices relative to the affairs of these princes, and that, as early as the year 910, the new occupiers of Dublin were beginning to spread devastation over Ireland and Mona. It is not to be wondered at, that the inhabitants, now groaning under a foreign yoke, or smarting under the lash of tyranny, should have remembered their late valiant and successful protectors, with gratitude and veneration; should have amplified all their gallant actions, and made them the theme of the heroic tale, and patriotic fiction.

There are other circumstances, which bring Fingal and his heroes to the same age.—Many of their victories are represented as having been achieved in the Islands of Lochlin. Romance places the scene of these victories in Scandinavia;

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\* W. Archæol. p. 584.

but history whispers, that such achievements could have happened only in those Islands, bordering upon Scotland, which had been occupied by the men of Lochlin or Scandinavia. But where shall we find an historical period that afford probable grounds, as much as Romance requires, for the report of such victories? I think it must be sought only in the interval between the subjugation of those Islands, and their peaceful settlement—after Harold's invasion of the Hebrides, in 875, and before the Norwegians had organized a general plan for the defence of their new conquests; which they may be supposed to have done, about the year 900. This people had conducted a fleet of considerable force amongst the Hebrides, exploring and conquering them in succession. But as the extent of the individual Islands was small, they could only leave a few settlers in each of them, with a military force, just sufficient to keep the ancient inhabitants in awe, whilst the bulk of the armament was hastening to other conquests. At this critical juncture, before the Norwegian government was confirmed, a moderate force, arriving from Caledonia, in either of the new conquered Islands of Lochlin, might easily have obtained such momentary advantages as those which the traditional tales ascribe to Fingal and his heroes. And the victories are ascribed to Fingal, because *Fenii*, or men of *Fin*, seems to have been a general term for the guards of the coasts, in Ireland and Scotland,

though *Fin Mac Coul* himself could not have been present with all their parties. It may also be remarked, that the tales and poems sometimes represent the men of Lochlin, as in the act of assaulting an Island for the first time. Such atoms of history, therefore, as they may possibly contain, must be referred to the former part of the reign of Harold Harfager, and to no other period.

Again: the poem of Carthon, one of the best in the whole collection, records the overthrow of the Strath Cluid Britons. Balclutha, the *Alcluth of Bede*, was destroyed in the days of Fingal's father. The survivors of that catastrophe retired further into the territories of the Southern Britons, and the city lay desolate in the days of Fingal. "I have  
" seen (says that hero), the walls of Balclutha, but  
" they were desolate. The fire had ascended in  
" the halls; and *the voice of the people was heard*  
" *no more*. The stream of Clutha had removed  
" from its place, by the fall of the walls. The  
" thistle shook there its lonely head: the moss  
" whistled to the wind. The fox looked out from  
" the windows; the rank grass of the wall waved  
" round his head. Desolate is the dwelling of  
" Moina; silence is in the hall of her fathers."

The city is not represented as having been, previous to its fall, under the protection of a Roman garrison: it had been governed by a native and independent prince. The incidents of the poem will by no means accord with the ages of Roman

government; but they are remarkably consistent with the history of the place, in the ninth century, as it is preserved by Caradoc.—“A. D. 870, the  
 “northern pagans destroyed *Alclud*.—A. D. 890,  
 “those men of Strath Cluid, who refused to unite  
 “with the Saxons, were compelled to leave their  
 “country, and remove into North Wales, where  
 “they had lands assigned to them by Anarawd.”\*  
 Such were, evidently, the historical facts which the compiler of the *tale* of Carthor had in view: and they relate to that *very age*, in which I have placed the achievements of Fingal.

Of all the incidents of this hero's private life, there is none upon which the Irish and Scots are more perfectly agreed, than his marriage with a daughter of Cormac, king of Ulster, and nominal sovereign of all Ireland. But then, the Irish and Scotch tales carry back this Cormac to the middle of the third century, a very suspicious age, in Irish annals.

For the hero who successfully resisted the Norwegians—who lived *after* this people had obtained possession of the Western Islands, and *before* they had established themselves in Ireland, we can look no higher than the *ninth* century,—the age of Alfred and Harold Harfager. And in this very age, history presents us with a *Cormac*, a very religious and charitable prince, and the king and *bishop* of all Ireland. He died in the year 905.† Con-

\* W. Archæiol. v. ii. p. 480, 482.

† Ibid. p. 393, 484.

necting this with what has gone before, I conjecture that this Cormac, and no other, was the father-in-law of the great Fingal. The different copies of Caradoc, and the Welsh chronicle of the Saxons, add that *Culennan*, or the son of *Culkennan*, was slain in battle about the same time; or, as the last mentioned chronicle expresses it, *in the same battle*. The Irish name here intended may, possibly, be the same which Mr. Macpherson writes *Colculla*, and we learn from Temora, Book iv. and a note on Book vi. that this Colculla rebelled against Cormac, a little before his death, and that he was slain by Fingal. And the subject of the whole Temora is the rebellion of the nephews of Colculla against the family of Cormac, and their overthrow by the arms of Fingal. Till I find reason for altering my opinion, I shall, upon these premises, ground a *conjecture*, for I pretend to nothing more, that this hero rendered himself famous, in the former part of the reign of Harold Harfager.

The Scots will object, that they have an authentic record of their kings, during this period; and that no such names as *Trenmor*, *Trathal*, *Comhal*, and *Fingal*, are found in the royal catalogue of the ninth century. These heroes have not yet been conceded to Caledonia: but, without detracting from the credit of the Galic Bard, more than truth requires, it may be replied, that upon the face of the poems, which have been published in his name, Fingal is no where represented as king of Scotland. He is only de-



scribed as chief of a desert called *Morven*, in the west of that country. Here stood his royal castle of Selma. This kingdom of *Morven* may have been nothing more than a small territory still known by the same name, opposite to the Isle of Mull, in which I suppose his Scandinavian hill of *Gor-mul* to have been situated. Our hero may have actually been Lord of this *Morven*, and yet, as the *son* and the *consort* of Irish princesses, he may have commanded a military corps, whose province it was to watch the motions of the Norwegians, upon the coast of Ulster, as well as in the west of Scotland. And these are the principal scenes of his actions.

In attempting to ascertain the age of a hero, of whom I can hardly catch a steady glimpse, through the mists of fable, I have availed myself of a few slight, but leading circumstances, which uniformly reduce him from the *third* to the *ninth* century. Should this degradation offend his noble relatives, in Ireland or Scotland, I must plead, in my own vindication, that I am still more indulgent to Fingal's claims of antiquity, than some of their own tales and poems, which recite his adventures. In support of this assertion, I will now produce a remarkable instance of the communication of romance between these two countries, and of the confusion of ancient and modern times.

The antiquaries of Ireland, astonished by the confidence with which Mr. Macpherson had robbed them of their *Oisin*, and of all their venerated *Fenii*,

began loudly to remonstrate. And in 1789, a volume appeared, which I have had frequent occasions to quote. In vindication of the cause of her country, Miss Brooke, daughter of the celebrated Henry Brooke, Esq. published her *Reliques of Irish Poetry*. This lady did not imitate the editors of the Caledonian Ossian, in stopping to *compose* her *ancient* poems, before they were publicly exhibited. She gives her originals, literally transcribed from old copies, and offered to the inspection of the curious, with all their imperfections on their head.

The first poem in this collection is upon the death of Conloch, a hero of remote antiquity indeed, if antiquaries are infallible: for he was the son of Cuchullin; and we are told by Mr. O'Halloran, in his introduction to this piece, that Cuchullin, and the three sons of Usneach, *Naoise*, *Ainle*, and *Ardan*, lived in the reign of Conor Mac Nessa, king of Ulster, about *the year of the world 3950*: that is, according to our chronology, about fifty years before Christ. The Caledonian Ossian brings all these heroes upon the stage, in the days of Fingal, a chief of the *third* or the *ninth* century after Christ. There must be a trifling anachronism somewhere: but be this where it may, the poem represents Conloch, who had never seen his father from his infancy, as arriving from the coast of Scotland. He lands in Ireland, armed cap-a-pie, in the style of a true knight errant, vanquishes several of

the knights of Ulster, and is, at last, opposed, in single combat, to his own father, by whom he is mortally wounded. He then reveals the secret of his birth, dies with doleful lamentations, and is as dolefully bewailed by the unfortunate Cuchullin.

I would just remark that, amongst these heroes, who flourished fifty years before the birth of Christ, we find the Norwegian name of Auliffe, or Olave.—

“ Quick let a rapid courser fly,

“ Indignant *Auliffe* cried.”—

The earliest Auliffe whom I can discover, connected with Irish history, is he whom Gruffudd's biographer introduces, as Harold's successor, on the throne of Dublin. He died in the year 940, according to Caradoc, who also records an Irish prince, named *Congaloch* or *Conloch*, slain in 950. But to pass over these and the like circumstances, which might give rise to conjecture, the Scottish muse has seized on the incidents of this poem, and worked them up into two episodes of the eventful poem of *Cathula*,\* a labour of Ossian! Cathula, king of Inistore, or Orkney, had a son named *Conloch*, whom he had lost at sea, in his infancy. The babe was carried to shore, upon a shield, brought up by a Norwegian chief of one of the islands, accidentally opposed to his father, in single combat, mortally wounded, and then recognized. The lamentations of the fallen hero, and of his disconsolate parent, are a mere echo of the Irish poem.

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\* Galic Antiq. p. 229.

The only difference is, that one of the fathers is named *Cuchullin*, or *Cuthullin*, and is president of the knights of Ulster, whilst the other is called *Cathula*, king of Inistore—but tradition is not constant in this variation.—The editor of the *Galic Antiquities* observes,—“ From the resemblance  
 “ between the names of Cathula and Cuthullin, and  
 “ both having a son called Conloch, many who  
 “ repeat the poem, in place of Cathula, substitute  
 “ the more familiar name of Cuthullin, and call the  
 “ poem by the title of ‘ *Mar marbh Cuthullin a*  
 “ *mhac*,’—‘ *How Cuthullin slew his son*.’”

The authority of one *oral reciter* is as good as that of another. Neither this apology, therefore, nor the difference of eleven centuries and a half, in chronology, Cuthullin having lived, according to Mr. O'Halloran, fifty years before Christ, and Cathula, in the days of *Magnus the Great*, king of Norway, can persuade us, that the two stories are not from the same origin. It is not probable, that two fathers had lost their Conloch in his infancy, accidentally encountered and slain him in single combat, recognized him, as he lay upon the field, and then attended to, and uttered, the very same lamentations.

But which of the two poems is the original? The story of the Irish poem is simple and unaffected; whilst that of the Scotch is eventful and artificial. Of the former, Miss Brooke observes,—“ I have  
 “ not been able to discover the author of the poem

“ of Conloch ; nor can I ascertain the exact time  
 “ in which it was written ; but it is impossible to  
 “ avoid ascribing it to a very early period, as the  
 “ language is so much older than that of any of my  
 “ originals, the war odes excepted, and quite dif-  
 “ ferent from the style of those poems, which are  
 “ known to be the composition of the middle ages.”  
 The Highland poem, on the contrary, is but just  
 emerging into verse.—“ As several parts of this  
 “ poem are supplied from *the tale* or *Sgeulachd*, the  
 “ narrative is more prolix than it is in the general  
 “ run of old Galic poems.”\* We have, then, pretty  
 clear evidence, that the venerated Bard of Selma  
 has condescended to imitate the rhapsodies of his  
 Hibernian namesake.

I have just remarked, that the adventure of Cathula  
 happened in the days of Magnus the Great, king of  
 Norway. The second poem in Miss Brooke's col-  
 lection introduces this prince to our acquaintance.  
 There we find *Oisín* entertaining *St. Patrick* with  
 a story of his adventures. We are told that there  
 are numberless copies of this poem in the hands of  
 the learned and curious. The subject is an engage-  
 ment between *Finn* and Magnus the Great, high  
 king of Lochlin or Norway. Miss Brooke observes,  
 that Magnus is pronounced in the Irish, *Manos*, but  
 that the name, being a foreign one, is here purposely  
 written according to the spelling of the original.

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\* Galic Antiq. p. 230, note.

She adds, that the language is too modern to be ascribed to any earlier period than the middle centuries; and intimates a suspicion, that the Magnus of our Bard is the king of that name, who made some descents upon Ireland, about *the latter end of the eleventh century*. This suggestion I conceive to be well founded. For, before the eleventh century, I cannot discover, either in history or romance, a *Magnus*, who deserved the epithet of *Mor* or *Great*, and who was *Aird Righ*, or *supreme monarch* of Norway, as he is styled in this poem.

And if such was the age of the hero, I must allow, at least, four centuries more, for the production of a Bard, who could have been so utterly ignorant of the chronology of his subject, as to confound the ages of *St. Patrick*, *Fingal*, and *Magnus*, and to make them all contemporaries with Ossian: so that the poem could not have been composed before the fifteenth century.

The argument is, briefly, this;—Fingal, whilst engaged in the chase, is surprised by the appearance of a strange fleet upon the coast of Ireland. He calls a hero, to go and enquire who the adventurers were, and to demand their business. Conan, a bald-pated, cowardly babbler, makes some taunting remarks upon the peaceable disposition of Fergus, the son of Fingal, who, after a sharp reproof of Conan's insolence, accepts the commission. He returns, and reports the haughty demand of Magnus. The Fenii prepare for battle. Several heroes claim

the honour of the day, which Fingal reserves for himself. He vanquishes Magnus, in single combat, and binds him "on the blood-stained field;" but afterwards generously spares his life, and dismisses him, upon his promise to abstain from future injury.

The tale in this form, pleased the ear of the *ancient* Ossian of Caledonia, who adorned it with his numbers, and thus furnished Mr. Smith with an opportunity of presenting the public with the disgrace and downfall of Magnus, in the texture of two poems, which occupy thirty-eight quarto pages. The first of these is the *Cathula*, mentioned above: the other is entitled *Manos*; for Mr. Smith's oral editors had suppressed the *g*, in the middle of the name.

The whole of the Irish tale is incorporated into these two poems. But, as it may be admitted, that the Highlanders add something of their own, to what they borrow from Ireland, I shall prove that they have a national claim to one of the incidents contained in this latter part. Let me, first of all, demonstrate the general identity of this adventure of Magnus with that which is recorded in the Irish poems. We here find the invasion of Magnus, king of Lochlin—the contemptible insolence of the bald-pated Connan—the commission of Fergus—the single combat of Fingal and Magnus—the binding of the latter upon the field, and his release, upon promise of abstaining from future injury. All these particulars the reader has already observed,



in the argument of the Irish poem, the scene of which is upon the bank of the stream *Laoghaire*, in the original, *Eas Laoghaire*.\* The Scottish editors, suppressing the quiescent letters, as usual, call their poem of Manos, *La Eas Lao'aire, the Day of the Water of Lora*.†

If we need a stronger proof, that the Caledonian Bard had his eye upon this Irish poem, it is presented to us, in the close imitation, or rather, the direct copying of several of the verses. Thus, in the few specimens which the Scotch editor has given of his Galic originals, Ossian describes his brother Fergus:—

“ Dh' imich Fear'as mo breathair fein,  
“ Mar orra' shleibhte bha chruth.”‡

*In the Irish poem thus:—*

“ Tilleas Feargus mo brathair fein,  
“ Fe samhailte le grein a chruth.”§

And again, in *Connan's taunt over the prostrate hero:—*

“ Cumaibh rium Manos nan lann  
“ S' gu sgarainn a cheann f'a chorp.”||

*In the Irish poem:—*

“ Cuingbhidh dhamh Maghnus na lann  
“ Go sgarfad a ceann re na chorp.”¶

In these passages, the Highland poem recites the *very words* of the Irish, as nearly as they can be supposed to have been preserved by oral tradition. The Caledonian Ossian, therefore, not only

\* See Reliques of Irish Poetry, p. 64, 277. † Galic Antiq. p. 251.

‡ Galic Antiq. p. 260.

§ Reliques of Irish Poetry, p. 273.

|| Galic Antiq. p. 263.

¶ Reliques of Irish Poetry, p. 276.

adopts the subject of his Hibernian brother, and repeats his very language, with only a slight change of dialect and orthography; but even employs the same identical metre, which was used by the Irish poets of the fifteenth century. This is an important hint: it must not be lost.

The Scotch antiquary will demur to my opinion respecting the originality of the Irish poem. I have already offered some remarks in support of that opinion. I may now add, that the very metre, as I shall prove hereafter, gives strong testimony in favour of the Irish. And, as the dialogues between *Oisín* and St. Patrick were found in manuscripts of some antiquity, in the time of Edward Llwyd, I cannot throw them aside, in compliment to the detached episodes of the Highland reciter, which were, for the first time, committed to writing, and connected by the incidents of oral tales, in our own age.

If Fingal lived in the third century, which is the æra assigned to him, both by the Scots and Irish; or even if he was coeval with Harold Harfager, his personal conflict with Magnus, king of Norway, must be the subject of pure romance: and if we attend to the progress of romance, we shall always find that the copy which is most simple in its plan, and least decorated with adventitious incidents and descriptions, is the most ancient. No poet of any country, having the Scotch tale before him, would throw away the noble flights of fancy which it pre-

sents, and reduce it to the simple narrative of the Irish *Magnus Mor*. But on the other hand, when popular tradition had got hold of the latter, and embellished it with the decorations of a thousand tongues; when a man of genius found the tale in this enlarged form, and began to model it anew, he may easily have produced the *Cathula* and the *Manos* of the Caledonian Ossian. And, if the Irish Bard is not the copyist, he must have been the author: for the tale is *one*, in its leading incidents, and we find several of the Irishman's verses in the Scotch poem.

It appears, then, that the great Bard of Selma, not only makes his father enter the lists with a champion of the eleventh century, but actually condescends to imitate an Irish romance of the fifteenth. I have hinted that the *Manos* contains one incident which is historical, and to which the Scots have a national claim. I will now produce my authority, and thus ascertain the action, and identify the king of Lochlin, commemorated in these poems. We are told that Magnus, after his expedition in the Orkneys, according to the Highland poem, or, more truly, into Ireland, agreeably to the Irish tale, made an inroad on the western coast of Scotland; and this in direct violation of his promise. The brave Fingal, arriving soon after this upon the spot, found a neighbouring chief concealed in a cave, took him along with him into the field of battle,

where he encountered with Magnus, and mortally wounded him.\*

In the chronicle of Caradoc of Llancarvan, a writer of credit, and almost a contemporary † with the northern king, we have the following curious notice, respecting that identical Magnus, who shot Hugh, earl of Chester, on the shore of Anglesea:—  
 “ About the year 1101, Magnus, king (of Germany),  
 “ came the second time to Anglesea, and having cut  
 “ down a great quantity of timber, he returned to  
 “ the Isle of Man, where he is said to have repaired  
 “ three castles, which he had formerly destroyed,  
 “ and to have garrisoned them, the second time, with  
 “ his own men. He sent to demand the daughter  
 “ of Murchath, the chief man of Ireland, as a consort for his son, and obtained her with a good  
 “ grace. He made that son king of Man, and  
 “ remained in the island himself during that winter.

“ The next year, Magnus, king (of Germany), ‡  
 “ set sail with a few ships, and began to lay waste  
 “ the coast of North Britain. When the inhabitants  
 “ perceived this, they began to ascend in troops,  
 “ like emmets, out of holes and caves, to drive away  
 “ their stock: and when they perceived that the  
 “ king had but few attendants, they advanced boldly  
 “ to give him battle. The king, observing their

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\* See the poem of Manos at large.

† He died A. D. 1156, W. Archaiol. v. ii. p. 389.

‡ I conceive the word *Germania* was introduced by some copyist, and that Caradoc only wrote *Magnus Vrenin, King Magnus*.

“ motions, drew out his lines, regardless of the  
 “ multitude of his enemies, or the smallness of his  
 “ own company. And whilst the *Albanians*, ac-  
 “ cording to their custom, were vaunting of their  
 “ numberless victories in days of yore, he engaged  
 “ them with disadvantage. The battle being joined,  
 “ many fell on both sides, and the king was slain  
 “ by the trampling of the numerous host of his  
 “ enemies.”\*

The king here commemorated was Magnus, sur-named *Barford*, who, according to the Norwegian history, conquered part of Ireland, invaded the Western Islands of Scotland, and died somewhere in the British Islands, in 1103.† I presume he was the only Magnus, high king of Lochlin, whose death has been imputed to the Caledonians, by any page of history. Caradoc’s account, if I may judge from its tone, must have been derived from some of the surviving friends of this prince, who seems to have been engaged, not with any regular force, but with an assemblage of the populace.

According to my conjecture, the heroes whom the Irish and Scotch Bards have confronted in this field, lived at a distance of two centuries from each other: and I think the first compiler of the tale was led into this anachronism, by his ignorance of the real æra of Fingal and Magnus. He had heard

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\* W. Archæiol. v. ii. p. 404.—From a copy of the *fourteenth* century.

† See Hist. of Norway, in the Atlas Geograph.

some vague tradition of the Norwegian king's defeat. He knew not when it had happened, or to whom the victory ought to be ascribed: but in some remote age, the Fenii had been the brave antagonists of the men of Lochlin; and the chief of the Fenii, as every one knew, was the renowned *Finn Mac Coul*. Upon the accuracy of these ideas, let the antiquaries of Caledonia and Erin decide.

The historical incident, quoted from Caradoc, affords, at least, a fair criterion, whereby to judge of the antiquity of the poems which have been ascribed to Ossian. Cathula and Manos present us with some of the most sublime and most pathetic passages which are to be found amongst the productions of the Galic muse. Ossian is never more beautiful, more original, or more at home. Here are examples of every species of his excellence, which is displayed in Dr. Blair's Dissertation. Here we have also the fairest picture of primitive manners, the allusions to Fingal's wars with the *kings of the world*, and all the antiquated opinions and customs, upon which the fame of Ossian has been reared. But, if the Irish Bard relates the tale of Magnus to St. Patrick, his *imitative* brother introduces the *Culdee*, or one of the first propagators of Christianity. This violent anachronism alone demonstrates, that the tissue has been woven long, very long after the days of Magnus. With Magnus, king of Lochlin, must therefore necessarily sink, all

the internal evidence of the Bard's antiquity : and when this is gone, what support is there left to him ?

In vain shall we be told, that these two poems are not in Mr. Macpherson's collection. That gentleman published and suppressed what he thought proper. Mac Vurrich, who had *his treasure* first committed to writing, came down to our own times. Mr. Smith's originals, as well as those of his predecessor, were collected from oral repetitions of the Highlanders, in the eighteenth century. They had the name and character of Ossian equally stamped in their very texture. They were equally accredited by national opinion, as his genuine productions, and equally favourites of the people. Remove one of these columns, and down falls the triumphal arch of the Bard of Selma.



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## SECTION IV.

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## SECTION IV.

*On the principles of versification, in the Galic poems, ascribed to Ossian.*



The structure of Ossian's verse adduced by the favourers of his cause, as an argument of his antiquity---The form of his verse---its principles unknown amongst the present Highlanders---but taught by the Irish---and explained, by extracts from their grammars---that it was invented in Ireland---and borrowed from thence by the Scots---that it is not older than the *fifteenth* century---and, therefore, it limits the antiquity of the Galic poems.

The system of versification amongst the old Celtic tribes---founded in rhyme and alliteration---remains of this system in the Irish Bards---and in some fragments of Galic poems---that such fragments alone preserve the character of antiquity.---A few concluding remarks upon the Highland dialect.

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OF the many arguments which have been brought forward, in proof of the high antiquity of Ossian's poems, one still remains to be considered. It is grounded upon the peculiar structure of the verse, and is deserving of particular attention, though it has been rather modestly insinuated, than closely urged, by the learned editors.

Mr. Macpherson has not, in his translated volumes, indulged the public curiosity with any specimens of the metres of his author; neither does he explain the principles upon which they are constructed: but he insists upon their general mechanism, as a circumstance which must have greatly facilitated the oral preservation of the poems. "The use of letters (he tells us), was not known in the north of Europe, till long after the institution of the Bards: the records of the families of their patrons, their own, and more ancient poems, were handed down by tradition. Their poetical compositions were admirably contrived for that purpose. They were adapted to music; and the most perfect harmony was observed. Each verse was so connected with those which preceded or followed it, that, if one line had been remembered, in a *stanza*, it was almost impossible

“to forget the rest. The cadences followed in  
 “so natural a gradation, and the words were so  
 “adapted to the common turn of the voice, after it  
 “was raised to a certain key, that it was almost  
 “impossible, from a similarity of sound, to substitute one word for another.”\*

I know not how this general description could, pertinently, have a place in our author's Dissertation, unless it was meant, particularly, to apply to the metres of Ossian: and yet, such application must appear a little surprising to those who have learned from Mr. Smith, and Mr. Shaw, that hardly any two persons repeat the same poem alike. The contradiction, here, is not in matter of opinion, but in the statement of plain facts. Passing over such objections, and receiving the above paragraph, as it stands, we may be led to suppose some consummate efforts of art, or some happy developement of natural principles, in the structure of Galic verse; and to wish that these principles had been elucidated by the learned editor, who speaks of them as if he understood them: but, from him, we hear nothing more.

Dr. Blair, who introduces into his Dissertation an account of *Gothic* verse, with a marked reference to the poems of Ossian, seems to prepare us for the contemplation of stanzas without rhyme.—“Olaus  
 “Wormius—has given a particular account of the

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\* Diss, on the *Æra*.

“ Gothic poetry—he informs us that there were no  
 “ fewer than 136 different kinds of measure, or  
 “ verse, used in their *Vyses*; and, though we are  
 “ accustomed to call rhyme a Gothic invention, he  
 “ says expressly, that among all these measures,  
 “ rhyme, or correspondence of final syllables, was  
 “ never employed. He analyzes the structure of  
 “ one of these kinds of verse—which exhibits a very  
 “ singular species of harmony—depending neither  
 “ upon rhyme nor upon metrical feet, or quantity  
 “ of syllables, but chiefly upon the number of syl-  
 “ lables, and the disposition of letters. In every  
 “ stanza was an equal number of lines; in every  
 “ line, six syllables. In each distich, it was requisite  
 “ that three words should begin with the *same letter*;  
 “ two of the corresponding words placed in the first  
 “ line of the distich, the third in the second line.  
 “ In each line were also required two syllables, but  
 “ never the final ones, formed, either of the *same*  
 “ consonants or same vowels. As an example of  
 “ this measure, Olaus gives us these two Latin lines,  
 “ constructed exactly according to the above rules  
 “ of Runic verse:—

“ *Christus caput nostrum*

“ *Coronet te bonis.*”—

“ The initial letters of *Christus*, *caput*, and *coronet*,  
 “ make the three corresponding letters of the dis-  
 “ tich. In the first line, the first syllables of *Christus*  
 “ and of *nostrum*; in the second line, the *on*, in

“*coronet*, and in *bonis*, make the requisite correspondence of syllables.”\*

I have given this long extract, that the reader may have an opportunity of comparing the principles of Runic verse, with those of Ossian’s stanzas, which will be produced hereafter. I do not find in them an absolute identity of structure; yet I perceive a closer analogy than I should have expected, between *Celtic* and *Gothic* verse.

The want of rhyme in Ossian has been regarded as a circumstance highly favourable to his claim of antiquity: for Mr. Laing, in his strictures upon this Bard, adduces the rhymes of the Welsh poems as an argument, that they cannot be so old as the age to which they pretend.

In the year 1778, Mr. Shaw published the first grammar that was written or attempted to be written, for the Scotch dialect of the Galic. In that work he produces the two following stanzas from *Malvina’s Dream*, as a specimen of Ossian’s verse:—

“Thainic errach le sioladh nan speur,

“Cha d’eirich duill’ uaine dhamh fein;

“Chuinic oigna me samhach’s an talla,

“Agnus bhuail iad clairsach nam fonn.

“Bha deoir ag taomadh le gruaidhan Mhaluulin

“Chunic oigh’ me’s mo thuiradh go trom

“C’uim’ am bheil thu co tuisach a’ m’fhianuis

“Chaomh Ainnir og Luath-ath nan sruth.”†

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\* Critical Dissertation, *note*.

† “The spring returned with its showers, but no leaf of mine arose. The virgins saw me silent in the hall, and they touched the harp of joy. The tear was on the cheek of Malvina: the virgins beheld me in my grief. Why art thou sad, thou fairest of the maids of Lutha?”

Here, a stranger to the subject of Galic verse will discover neither rhyme nor alliteration, nor any other trace of artificial structure. He will be utterly at a loss to guess at the meaning of Mr. Macpherson's *connection*, which would suggest a whole *stanza*, from the recollection of a single *line*; and of his *harmonious cadence*, which rendered it almost impossible to substitute one word for another. The reader can only observe, that the lines are nearly of equal length, and that the composition divides itself into periods of four lines each. But this does not always happen: for the editors of Ossian are in the habit of striking out a lame or unnecessary line, whenever they please.

But let us hear the Galic grammarian, upon the foregoing passage:—"The measure of Ossian's poetry is *very irregular* and *various*. Generally, he has *couplets* of eight, though they do not rhyme, and seven, and sometimes nine syllables. *These feet* are most commonly, trochee and dactyle. The trochee occupies the first, the dactyle the second and third, and a long syllable ends the line."\*

In this passage, which is not eminently perspicuous, Mr. Shaw speaks of *couplets*; but Mr. Macpherson's term, *stanzas*, is more appropriate; as it is evident, from the numerous specimens in

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\* Analysis of the Galic Lang. p. 132.---2d edit.



the Galic Antiquities, that the lines of these poems generally resolve themselves into tetrastichs.

If we demand of the Caledonians some information respecting the principles of these stanzas of Ossian, so highly characterized by Mr. Macpherson, what must be our surprize, upon being told by their only grammarian, that “ Galic poets *never* yet wrote “ by any other rule than the ear, and certain pieces “ of music; and for that reason, though we may “ easily see what sort of measure each piece delights “ in, the uniformity of the same number of similar “ measures in every line, does not always return. “ This may be easily accounted for, by observing “ that all compositions have hitherto been orally “ repeated, and which, *by different persons will ever “ be differently performed:* whereas, *had the pieces “ been written, every one would have repeated them “ alike.* Even Ossian’s poems could not be scanned : “ *for every reciting Bard pronounced some words “ differently, and some times substituted one for “ another.*—Having no correct edition of any poem “ in the language, we can only, in general, observe “ what measure the poets employ, and recommend “ regularity and method to future writers.”\*

Mr. Shaw does not attempt to analyze a single stanza of any kind of verse. He was, probably, no Galic poet: but his grammar was several years in preparing; and his undertaking demanded of him

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\* Analysis of the Galic Lang. p. 130.

to make diligent enquiry, and procure the best information upon the subject, that was to be obtained. We will suppose that he has done this, and that he acquiesces in the discovery, that the Caledonians had never possessed a national prosody.

But the *ear* of the versifier must have proposed to itself some model, either of native or foreign device. There must be some rules to ascertain wherein a legitimate verse consists: some criterion to distinguish verse from mere prose. And if the best informed Caledonians are not able to produce any such rules, nor even a tradition that their ancestors had ever possessed any rules of their own; we must not only think them very incompetent to descant upon the beauties of their national versification; but we shall also be induced to suspect, that their Bards only imitated some verse of foreign device, the principles of which ought to be sought for in another country.

Mr. Shaw was fully aware, that the Galic had been abandoned to the caprice of an illiterate populace, and that, to such of his countrymen, who aspired to the knowledge of letters, the *Irish had always been the written and the studied language*. And ought not this conviction to have suggested a hint, that the language, which had furnished the Highlanders with letters and books, might also have supplied them with the rules of composition?

In my comparison between the Irish poem of Magnus the Great, and Ossian's Caledonian poem,

upon the same subject, I have produced instances of the *same verse*, and the *same identical couplet* appearing in the work of the Irish and Scotch Bard. This coincidence exhibits an absolute demonstration, that the verse used by the Bards of both countries is the very same, in its principles and structure. Nor is this identity of metre merely accidental. Excepting a few short passages, which are adapted to some popular airs, and a few other anomalies, the printed specimens of Ossian, in general, amounting to some thousands of lines, are composed in the tetrastichs of those Irish Bards, whom Mr. Macpherson confidently assigns to the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Some punctilios of Irish prosody may have eluded the attention of the illiterate\* composers, and the more illiterate reciters of Galic poetry, such as they have been described by Mr. Shaw; notwithstanding this, in every essential article, they have copied with success. Had the grammarian of Caledonia, therefore, compared the Galic with the Irish tetrastichs, and then consulted the Irish grammarians, he would have found an easy access to the Parnassus of Ossian.

Is there no legitimate son of the Hibernian Muse—no grammarian of Erin, still in being, to attend to this circumstance, and, with one dash of his pen, to dispose of the question, respecting the antiquity

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\* I mean *illiterate* with regard to Celtic grammar, and the rules of Celtic composition: in other respects the Highland poets may have been accomplished scholars.

of the Galic poems? Such a man might demonstrate, that one of these nations borrowed the laws of verse from the other: he might boldly aver, that his countrymen, who have written a host of grammars, did not derive their prosody from the Caledonians, who, till within these thirty years, had never possessed so much as the skeleton of a national grammar. He might insist upon it, that, though the Highlanders, who look only to their Galic, are utterly ignorant of the mechanism of these tetrastichs, the case is very different in Ireland; and that the stanzas of, seemingly, a loose texture, as not being constructed upon obvious principles, are, nevertheless, extremely artificial, and the result of much grammatical refinement. And, considering by what means Ossian has been preserved, and through what medium he has reached the public, the critic need not be alarmed, upon the discovery of a few occasional irregularities, in the Caledonian Bard.

Till our sister island calls forth a patriotic son, duly qualified for this task, she will forgive my wielding a feeble pen in defence of her cause. Our Welsh antiquary, Edward Llwyd, in the *Brief Introduction* prefixed to his Irish Dictionary, has given a considerable detail of the principles and rules of the Hibernian prosody, extracted from the grammar of Father O'Molloy,\* and another in manu-

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\* Published at Rome, 1677.

script, by an unknown author. I shall present the reader with a few sketches from this compendium.

1. The Irish Bards divide the vowels into *Broad*; as A, O, U; and *Small*, as E, I. 2. Diphthongs and triphthongs, when employed in *concord*s, generally belong to the class of their leading vowel; but, in *terminations*, they often follow the rank of their concluding vowel. 3. The consonants are distributed into eight several classes; thus, C, P, T, are *Soft*.—B, D, G, are *Hard*.—Ch, Th, Fh, Ph, Sh, are *Rough*.—Ll, Nn, Rr, M, Ng, are *Robust*.—Bh, Dh, Gh, Mh, L, N, R, are *Light*.—F, is *Weak*—S, *Barren*—and H, *Hollow*.

In the various kinds of alliteration, introduced into Irish verse, the return of the same identical vowel or consonant is not required, it being deemed sufficient to exhibit correspondent letters *of the same class*, agreeably to the above table.

I must stop here, to make a few remarks.—Mr. Shaw discovers part of this system, or of a similar system, in the rude and neglected Galic. Thus:—  
 “The vowels—are either *Broad* or *Small*—*a, o, u*,  
 “are broad—*e* and *i*, small.”\* “Sounds are either  
 “*quick* or *slow*, *rough* or *smooth*, *strong* or *feeble*.”†  
 “In the Galic, certain letters have *strong*, *bold*,  
 “*smooth* or *solemn* sounds. *O* and *u* are *bold*,  
 “*strong*, and *solemn*. The combinations *ai*, *ei*, are  
 “cheerful and soft—*ao* is soft and solemn—*eo*, *io*,

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\* Analysis, p. 19.

† Ibid. p. 127.

“are musical. Consonants likewise have their inherent power of expression. *L*, *Bh*, and *Mh*, are soft and meek. *C*, *G*, *Ch*, *Gh*, are soft, sprightly, and forcible. *R*, is angry and proud.”\* &c.

Whether such a classification as that of the Irish Bards, be founded in nature or not, it is surely, by no means obvious or simple: and I hardly think that a Bard of the third century could have told, by his ear, that *Th* was *rough*, *Gh* *light*, &c.; especially if they were equally reduced to quiescence, as in the present mode of pronouncing the language.

But to return to the prosody.—Syllables are long, middle, or short.—*Ai*, *eu*, *ia*, and *ua*, are always long. The other diphthongs, and all the vowels, are doubtful. 5. Any vowel may be substituted for another *of the same class*, for the sake of quantity.

6. The several sorts of Irish metre, *now in use*, consist of verses of six, seven, eight, nine, or, sometimes, more syllables. Two of these verses constitute a *couplet*, and two couplets, a *stanza*. All verse is composed in such stanzas, excepting some short lyric pieces, adapted to any particular tune. 7. Every stanza, and every couplet, must begin and conclude, without any grammatical dependence on any word preceding or following.

8. There are five sorts of metre called *Direct* or *Just* metre, each line of which generally consists of seven syllables, admitting of the figure *synalæpha*.

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\* Analysis, p. 128.



These metres require the following ornaments:—  
**CONCORD**, or that two words in each line, begin with the *same* vowels or consonants, or with vowels or consonants of the *same class*. This rule is subject to many modifications and grammatical minutiae; as, that no particle makes or prevents a concord: that a concord after a verb is not approved of, and may be avoided by seven kinds of transposition, which are all described, &c. The next thing required is **CORRESPONDENCE**, or the agreement of two words in number of syllables, *quantity* of vowels, and class of consonants, as in the words *roc, sop, lot*; but the agreement of the final consonants is dispensed with in particular cases. **TERMINATION** is also demanded; or a correspondence between the final words in the verses of the same couplet. This is sometimes imperfect, and is then called **UNION**. Next comes **CHIEF**; or an agreement in the *class* of letters which conclude the two *couplets* of the same *stanza*. This is the hinge which connects the two couplets together; and, as the same identical letters are admissible, as well as letters of the same class, it often produces a perfect rhyme, between the second and fourth line, both in Irish and Galic tetrastichs.

9. In the kind of verse called *Seuda*, the first line of each couplet contains eight syllables, and ends with a dissyllable: the second line has seven syllables, and closes with a monosyllable.



10. The *Great Metre* has seven syllables in each line, and the termination is always a monosyllable : it requires an *Union* between the final words of the second and fourth line.

11. The *Small Metre* has the like *Union* between the terminations of the *second* and *fourth* ; but concludes each line with a dissyllable.

12. The laws of verse, as described by my author, are so numerous and punctilious, that they must have rendered the composition of regular verse, very difficult, notwithstanding the variety of exceptions and licences which are authorized. The Bards have therefore devised a kind of stanza, called *Oglachas*, in imitation of either of the preceding metres, only that it dispenses with *true correspondence* and *true union*, contenting itself with producing the same general effect upon the ear, with the more rigid metres. This must be very convenient for the indolent, illiterate, or less accurate Bard. And many of the stanzas of Ossian, as they are now brought forward, will be found to muster under this banner.

It appears from these extracts, that the Irish muse delights in a variety of correspondent sounds. Yet these are not direct alliterations, which obviously strike the ear, as in the old Runic poetry ; but are regulated according to the table of classes which I have given above. So that the composition of a regular stanza, which leaves so slight a perception of harmony upon the organs of a stranger, is frequently a thing of difficult accomplishment.

This prosody delivers also a variety of rules, respecting the number of syllables in the concluding word of each line, and the agreement between the terminations of the several verses in each stanza; all which are either exactly copied by the Caledonian Bards, or else imitated, with such equivalent conceits, as to impress full conviction upon the mind, that both nations versified upon the very same system, and that the model is found in the Irish grammars of the *seventeenth* century, and in the practice of Irish Bards, perhaps for an age or two preceding that period. Of the principles and structure of this verse, the few particulars which I have extracted may serve to communicate a general idea. If the reader wishes for more information upon the subject, I must refer him to my author, or to the Irish grammars of the seventeenth century.

Puerile as some of these laws of verse may appear, they were evidently the invention of a people who applied closely to the study of letters, however they may have perverted the use of them. This appears upon the hypothesis, that the words were pronounced as they are written. But if we suppose that the Irish pronunciation has remained fixed, as it is at present, from the time when these laws were ratified, their invention must have been utterly impossible to illiterate genius: for there are several of these laws which apply only to the eye, and escape the cognizance of the most accurate ear. Elements which return precisely the same sound, or

no sound at all, from the mouth of an Hibernian or Caledonian speaker, are disposed in separate classes, by the edicts of the Bards.

For the better comprehension of my meaning, it may be proper in this place, to acquaint the reader, that the Irish, of our days, entirely suppress the sound of several of their aspirated consonants, and run the vowels which precede, and those which follow such consonants, all into one syllable, pronouncing *Aghaidh* as *yi*; *Amhuil* as *Auel*, &c. But this seems to me to be a modern corruption. It could hardly have been the case, when the system of prosody, now before us, was first adjusted. And in some of the older Irish poems, which were composed with full sounding alliterations, this corruption of *oral* language, appears more forcibly. For in the *modern* copies of those poems, we often find one consonant retaining its due sound, whilst that which ought to be its correspondent, is rendered absolutely quiescent, by a point placed over it, or an *h* subjoined.

It was the decided opinion of Edward Llwyd, that the ancient Irish did, distinctly, pronounce all their aspirated consonants: and, if my recollection does not deceive me, Mr. Walker, author of the *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards*, declares that, as late as the fifteenth century, the laws of metre required that all the aspirates should be distinctly pronounced.

Whenever a living and oral language differs materially from its ancient orthography, it may be received as a general maxim, that the latter is corrupted or changed: for why should letters have been introduced, that were not essential to their appropriate words; and how could they have been essential, if they did not represent certain sounds, at the time of their introduction? why should the old Irish have written *Aghaidh* or *Agaid*, if the sound intended to be expressed was nothing more than *yi*?

For the corruption of Irish enunciation, Mr. Shaw accounts, very probably, in the introduction to his grammar. “ Though there were English colonies  
“ in Ireland, the *Gael* (ancient inhabitants) of that  
“ country enjoyed their own laws and customs, till  
“ the reigns of Elizabeth, and James the first, when  
“ the English laws were universally established.  
“ Then, for the first time, the Galic ceased to be  
“ spoken, by the chiefs of families, and at court.  
“ English schools were erected, with strict injunctions, that the vernacular language should no  
“ longer be spoken, in those seminaries.” The Irish language was, of course, abandoned to the caprice of the populace.

Agreeably to this, we learn from Miss Brooke’s *Reliques*, that during the eighteenth century, this language was in such low estimation, that their favourite Bards were such as had been deprived of

sight, in their infancy, and, consequently, were absolutely illiterate.

This venerable tongue having thus been at the mercy of the vulgar for two centuries, the natural consequences have ensued. The populace generally abridge the labour of speaking. In the borders of Wales, where the *gentlemen* despise the Cambro-British, and the people understand just English enough, to dispense with Divine service in their native tongue, how often do we hear such phrases as—"Be' sy' dalu," instead of "Beth sydd i dalu," *What is to pay?*—"Ble i' ch' i' myn'd," for "I ba le ydych chwi yn myned," *Where are you going*, &c. So the English peasant says, "*I canna*," for *I cannot*; "Le ma ha'n woot," for, *Let me have it, will you*, &c. As we appeal from all such jargons as these, to the Welsh and English languages, as written and spoken by persons better informed, so I would appeal from the "*fragmina vocum*" of the peasant of Erin, to the orthography of Irish books.

At all events, those laws of verse, which we have been considering, were not the invention of a nation which had *no established orthography*—they could not have been observed by the illiterate versifier—they could not have been the device of the ancient Celtæ, a people who were never studious of letters.

In Ossian, a Caledonian of the third century, we should naturally look for a versification, constructed upon the most simple and obvious principles, such,

for instance, as the stated return of similar sounds, which make a forcible impression upon the ear : we should expect a measure that did not depend upon minute grammatical distinctions. But these tetras-tichs were clearly the invention of the Irish, who compiled several grammatical tracts between the fifteenth and seventeenth century ; and in whose grammars alone their principles are to be found.

Upon what grounds can this proposition be denied ? The system of versification which was used both by the Scotch and Irish Bards, being the very same, we must either suppose, that a people comparatively learned, and who, for several ages, diligently studied the structure of their native language, borrowed a prosody, constructed upon the most minute grammatical and orthographical rules, from a nation who, confessedly, never possessed either grammar, orthography, or prosody of their own, or else we must admit the contrary.

And as I apprehend the mind of every unprejudiced man will, immediately, take the latter direction, it must follow, that the poems ascribed to Ossian could have had no existence before the Irish Bards had digested their present system of prosody, and the Scotch had learned to imitate their versification.

The history of the invention of this system is somewhat obscure ; but it is evidently of no ancient date. It could have had no being till after the Irish had established the custom of regularly distinguish-

ing their aspirated consonants by a particular mark, which they first began to do about the twelfth century, when the admixture of Englishmen with the native inhabitants rendered such a distinction necessary. It must have originated after the introduction of *exotic* learning into Ireland, and after that learning had deviated from the road of important research, in pursuit of curious trifles. In short, its birth seems to have coincided with the expiring moments of Erin's literary fame. The oldest examples of stanzas, constructed upon this system, are found in those romantic poems which bear the name of *Oisin*, and which Mr. Macpherson positively, and with apparent accuracy, ascribes to the Bards of the fifteenth and sixteenth century. And there can be no doubt that the practice of the Bards accompanied the several stages of their invention.

The completion of this scheme cannot be carried farther back than the fifteenth century: for, in pieces which preceded that age, at a short interval, it appears unformed, and in its embryo state. And, in poems which are still more ancient, the structure of Irish verse is totally different. This will be seen hereafter. But the poems of Ossian, published by Mr. Smith, and those fragments of Mr. Macpherson's originals, which have been allowed to see the light, exactly resemble, in the structure of their verse, the tetrastich form of the modern Irish Bards. In some instances, a few deviations may be remarked. But these are such only as may be found



in the less accurate Bards of the Irish themselves, and such as might be expected in the works of any unlearned versifier, who should attempt to imitate measures, of a structure so very artificial and intricate. In the Caledonian poems, these irregularities may have been increased, by the faulty recital of persons who had no idea of any rules of verse whatsoever, or by the corruptions of Galic orthography. And after all, the general model is preserved.

The Highland poet, instead of placing before him a table of classifications, which, in many instances, addressed itself only to the eye, may have, occasionally, aimed at nothing more than to produce the same kind of audible harmony, by the mere assistance of his ear, and the same measure and cadence which he perceived in the Irish stanzas.

Thus a schoolboy, whilst a novice in his *Gradus*, may make half a dozen false quantities, in a copy of *hexameters* and *pentameters*; but still, it will be easy to ascertain the species of verse which he has aimed to produce. I think there can be no inconsistency in supposing that a Highland poet has sufficient general learning, to improve upon the plan of old Irish poems, whilst, at the same time, he may not be a perfect adept in Irish versification.\*

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\* I had in this place, analyzed some of the stanzas in the Galic Antiquities; but as Mr. Macpherson's originals are now before the public, they may afford a more satisfactory opportunity of illustrating my argument. The reader is therefore referred to my first *additional section*.

If any doubt should remain, as to the position here laid down ; if any specimens of the *unedited* Ossian, which differ more essentially from the structure of modern Irish tetrastichs, be quoted against me, I only ask, that the morsels of *lyric* measure be excepted, and that the specimens be fairly copied from manuscripts as old, at least, as the middle of the *eighteenth* century, in order to guard against injury, from the carelessness of oral reciters, or the abundant care of editors. And let a due comparison with Irish stanzas determine the question.

Till these vouchers be produced, and their testimony substantiated, I must be allowed to observe, upon the evidence that has already appeared—That the measures of Ossian's poems are essentially the same as those which are found in the works of the Irish Bards : that these measures arise from principles which are developed in the grammars of the Irish, as deduced from the practice of their national poets : that the application of these principles demand such a variety of punctilious grammatical observations, as to render it evident, that they were the invention of a people who studied the grammar of their own language ; whereas the Highlanders, the only people who use the same language with the Irish, never reduced their native dialect to any grammatical rules, before the year 1778. It follows, that the measures employed in Ossian's poems, are undoubtedly the invention of the Irish.

But as the original inventors were, certainly, the first people who used these measures, they must have appeared in Irish poems, before they could have been known in Caledonia. And the Irish never used them before the fifteenth century. Not a single fragment, therefore, of the Caledonian Ossian, in which these measures are either copied or imitated, can possibly be ascribed to any earlier period.

Notwithstanding, therefore, all that has been brought forward, relative to the high antiquity of Ossian, and his primitive metres, we have still to inquire for the mode of versification used by the ancient Celtic tribes.

The language of the passions is not less natural to man than the passions themselves: so that I can hardly conceive the existence of a nation, which had not some idea of poetry; but, whatever may be objected upon this head, it is certain that the Celtæ had their poets. And though it should not appear, at first sight, that verse is essential to poetry, yet we have the best authority to assert, that the poets of the Celtæ, like those of most other nations, did compose in verse, upon whatever principle it was constructed.

For the universality of this concomitant of poetry, even amongst the barbarous nations, the following reason may be assigned. When we utter a single sentence, expressive of any passion, affection, or sudden emotion of the mind, nature dictates a

corresponding tone and modulation of the voice. Such modulations, however rude and simple we may suppose them to have been, amongst the primitive nations, may be regarded as natural music, and the foundation of that art, which study and cultivation have rendered so exquisite.

The first Bard, whether his subject was devotion, a victory, love or grief, uttered his ardent feeling, accompanied with an artless modulation. Emotion and passion delight in short sentences: this modulation had, therefore, its limited compass: and if the theme called for a second or a third strain, the very repetition of the *tune* would suggest a sentence of nearly the same length and cadence. Such divisions of poetic language, having been once pointed out, by the hand of nature, the way was open for gradual improvement; for the acquisition of regularity and ornament, all which were introduced, when poetry began to be studied as an art.

Then the poets of every country established such rules of versification as were suggested by the genius of their language, or such as their own taste and dexterity could devise. But as art, by this time, began to supersede nature, we might expect to find different principles of versification prevailing in the great primitive nations. The most ancient specimens of verse, which we have at present, are found in some parts of the old testament. And Dr. Hare, in his edition of the Psalms, has rendered it probable, that Hebrew verse was regulated by a determinate

number of syllables, or even by poetic feet; but owing to our ignorance of the true pronunciation of that language, the fact seems to be incapable of absolute demonstration. We also find, in the sacred poets, frequent alliterations and final rhymes. It is evident that these were by no means avoided, as blemishes, though we do not perceive their constant return, with that regularity which might warrant the conclusion, that they were studied as necessary appendages of verse. All that we can positively assert is, that the several periods of the same sacred poem are nearly of equal length; and that there is, generally, a kind of harmonious relation between the thoughts, or sentiments, expressed in the different members of the same period.

The Greeks and Romans, and some of the Asiatic nations, measuring the exact time or quantity of all their syllables, disposed them into feet of determinate length, which they employed in the construction of verse, and lyric strophes, of unrivalled harmony.

The Gothic nations, a people who were barely acquainted with letters, contented themselves with the simple device of numbering the syllables in every line, and decorating every couplet, or stanza, with a determinate number of strong alliterations, which made an immediate and forcible impression upon the uncultivated ear. This obvious contrivance is exemplified in the Latin distich of Wormius, already recited, and may be remarked in the

following lines of the Voluspa, the oldest of their poems now extant:—

*Brædor mono berias  
Oc at bonom verda  
Muno systrungar  
Sifiom spilla  
Hart er med haldrom  
Herdour mikill  
Skeggold scalmold  
Skildir klofnir, &c.*

Some principles of versification, equally obvious and simple with these before us, may be supposed to have existed in the national poetry of the ancient Celtæ: for though these people were perfectly distinct from the Gothic nations, they were nearly upon a level with them, as to the cultivation of the fine arts. We cannot suppose that they studied the *harmony of thought*, the elegant antithesis and repetition of the Hebrew poetry; nor does it appear that their language was analyzed with due accuracy, and sufficiently polished, to admit of any thing like the *harmonious feet* of Greek and Roman verse.

If we may judge of their verse, by the oldest specimens which can be produced by their descendants, in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Cornwall, they carried their art no farther than to adjust the number and cadence of syllables, in each line, to add the embellishment of strong and impressive alliteration, and to connect their verses with final rhymes, which were sometimes continued without variation, for several lines together.

Of the old poetry of the Irish, I shall have occasion to produce some examples, in the course of this section. For that of the *Britons*, in Scotland and Cornwall, I refer to the works of the great antiquary, Edward Llwyd.\* And, lest I should be accused of prepossession, in speaking of the Welsh Bards, I shall commit their cause entirely to *Mr. Turner*, who, in his learned and candid *Vindication*, has proved that the Welsh have considerable remains of the poetry of the sixth century, and that their verse is wholly constructed upon the principles here described.

Rhyme has been employed as an ornament in the verse of almost every nation, in modern Europe. Some critics had, indeed, asserted, that it was utterly unknown in this part of the world, before the *eighth* or *ninth* century. But the gentleman to whose able defence I have now referred, has removed this objection, by shewing that rhyme was sufficiently known, long before the time of the oldest Welsh Bard, whose works have been preserved.

I am searching, however, for the national verse of the ancient Celtæ, and I think it must be detected in that of their oldest descendants. Whom should the Bards of the sixth century have imitated, but their predecessors in their own country, and who

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\* See a specimen of the poetry of the Strath Cluid Britons, from a copy which Llwyd judged to be 1000 years old, now 1100, in the *Archæol.* p. 221. For the Cornish, see Llwyd's 5th Letter to Mr. Tonkin.—*Archæol. Cornu-Britan*, append.



had composed in their own language? What had they to do with the *Saracens*, or the *monks* of Italy? Had not sufficient proofs been adduced, that rhyme was *generally* known in Europe, as early as the first century of our æra, yet it might have been admitted as probable, that it was *peculiarly* known to the Celtæ, amongst whose ancient poets we find it in full establishment.

It cannot be objected, that it was of too complex and artificial a nature, to have occurred to this people, in their pagan state. For, of all the embellishments of verse, it is the most simple and obvious. Few men have produced hexameters and pentameters without design; but spontaneous rhymes often occur in common conversation; and when they occur, they strike the most uncultivated ear. The most illiterate are sensible of their impression, and can imitate them at pleasure.

This embellishment of verse must have been peculiarly convenient for the use of the Druidical order. It is recorded of them, that they learned to recite a multitude of verses, treating of their national superstition; and that the committing of such verses to writing, was prohibited by a positive law. They would, therefore, naturally avail themselves of every method they could device *to assist the memory*. To this end, nothing could have been more conducive, than the strong alliterations, and long-continued rhymes, which we find in the old Welsh Bards. The very sound of one word suggested the suc-

ceeding; and one line gave the echo of another. It must have been for the same purpose of assisting the memory, that these Bards frequently began several periods with the same phrase, and several successive lines with the same letter.

And as the *perfect* rhyme, which returns precisely the same sound at stated intervals, makes the strongest impression upon the ear; as it is most obvious to immediate remark, and, at the same time, the easiest model for imitation; so it must, for these reasons, have been more ancient than that which depends upon artificial classifications of the letters. Thus a stranger to the language, immediately sees the repetition of the same letters, and hears the return of the same sound, in the following lines of an old Welsh Bard :—

Mor yw gwael gweled

Cynnwro cynmired

Brathau a brithred

Brithwyr ar gerdded.

But in the subjoined example of *complete* Irish metre, the correspondence of letters is not so obvious :—

“ Naoi cced is tri fichid feibh,

“ Ag righadh deilis abett;

“ Soisir glic arnutha fhuinn,

“ Coisir Chalbhagh mhic Conuill.”

Who can discover any correspondence between the terminations of these lines, till he has learned by his table, that *ei*, in the *minor* termination *feibh*, constitute an *Ephthong*, of the same class with the *small* vowel *e*, in the *major* termination *abett*; and

that *m*, in *fhuinn*, and *ll*, in *Conuill*, are equally of the class of *robust* consonants?

In poetry of this kind, the judgment of the ear is superseded by the rules of an artificial prosody. A minute knowledge of the Irish grammar is requisite, not only to compose, but even to read and understand it. If we had not positive evidence to decide the question, general history and common sense would have led us to the conclusion, that such was not the ancient verse of the Irish nation, or of any Celtic tribe whatsoever. The system, as I have already observed, appears to have originated in an age, when the genius of Ireland was turned from solid learning to the pursuit of curious trifles; and not to have been completed before the fifteenth century. But to proceed—

*Alliteration*, or the repetition of similar sounds, in the first and middle syllables of lines, does not present itself to the ear with the same force as final rhyme. It is less obvious; and, therefore, I think its regular introduction, at stated intervals, is of more recent date than the other, amongst the Celtic Bards. But being of the same nature, or nothing more than a repetition of similar sounds, rhyme itself may have opened the way for the study of this embellishment, which was highly approved of by those Bards, as we may judge from the oldest remains of verse in Ireland and Wales.

The modern Welsh Bards have, indeed, carried their fondness for this ornament to a vicious excess.

For the sake of this, they neglect regularity of plan, arrangement of thought, and perspicuity of diction. But *their* correspondent sounds are those which are fixed by nature, and which the ear of a stranger cannot help perceiving, though it may not approve of their frequency.

The modern Irish Bards, as we have seen, are equally partial to correspondent sounds, of which they sometimes require six or seven, under different names, in a single couplet or half stanza, of their finished metres; and though they have *licence* to dispense with some of them, yet the rule must have been established before the exception was authorized. But their correspondences are wholly artificial. They escape the cognizance of the untutored ear; and no Irish composer, or reader, can point out the graces of metre, unless he remember his table, which tells him that these vowels and diphthongs are *broad*, and the others *small*; and that the consonants of one class are *soft*,—of another, *hard*,—of a third, *rough*, &c. Thus the difficulty of versification is augmented, whilst its effect is destroyed, and the pretensions to remote antiquity utterly overthrown.

Upon the whole it appears, that the mechanical correspondence of articulate sounds, however differently understood, is the great principle of Celtic verse in general, and that the *obvious* correspondence of sounds, *naturally similar*, was attended

to, before the Bards thought of that which is more complex and artificial.

We have already seen that the system of versification, which has been established in Ireland, for three or four centuries, as far as it regards the terminations of lines, in the same couplet, or of couplets in the same stanza, demands only a kind of artificial agreement. It dispenses altogether with natural rhyme. But of the specimens of Irish poetry which I have seen, I discover none in which the principles of this system act in their *full force*, of an earlier date than Fitzgerald's poem upon a ship, written in the reign of Elizabeth.\* Throughout this piece, legitimate rhymes, between the *second* and *fourth* line of the stanzas, are but thinly scattered, and seemingly by accident, as in the poems of the Caledonian Ossian, published by Mr. Smith.

And though the adjustment of the system before us be of somewhat higher antiquity, it seems to have been employed, at first, rather as a licence for the occasional neglect of rhyme, than as a general rule to supersede it altogether. For in the poems of the fifteenth or sixteenth century, we perceive a greater number of true rhymes than what could have been produced by accident, and more than what the laws now in force demand. Thus in the poem upon *Magnus the Great*,† the second and fourth line of

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\* See Reliques of Irish Poetry, p. 300.

† Ibid. p. 271.

the several stanzas, *generally*, rhyme audibly, and sometimes also, the *first* and *third*. The same is observable in *The Chase*\*, a poem of considerable length, which mentions the expedition of *Magnus*; which confounds his æra with that of St. Patrick, and is, therefore, a modern composition. See also the Romance of *Moirá Borb*†, which has a considerable number of alternate rhymes.

From these instances it is evident, that natural and audible rhyme was not wholly neglected, two or three hundred years ago, and that the artificial system was then only getting into vogue.

I have already quoted Miss Brooke's account of the poem of *Conloch*, the first in her collection—that it is impossible to avoid ascribing it to a very early period—that the language is much older than any of that lady's originals, the War Odes excepted, and that it is quite different from the style of those poems, which are known to be the composition of the middle ages—that is, of the *fifteenth* and *sixteenth* century, according to Mr. Macpherson, and, I believe, according to truth.

I have also observed, that Mr. O'Halloran, in his introduction to this piece, dates the subject about Anno Mundi, 3950. But I observe further, that the poet introduces the Norwegian name, *Auliffe* or *Olave*, amongst his *Anno Mundi* heroes; he speaks familiarly of "Proud India's splended plain,"

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\* See Reliques of Irish Poetry, p. 278.

† Ibid. p. 288.

of " Grecian shores," " Persian foes," Pictish chiefs," " Lochlin," " Spain," &c. and records a dispute about *paying the toll of a bridge in Ulster*. The piece is a high flown tale of chivalry, and taking it altogether, I cannot persuade myself that it is older than the thirteenth century, when that kind of romance began to be fashionable.\* Be that as it may, we here find several paragraphs in regular rhyme. The poem, for instance, opens thus:—

Tainig triath an borb laoch,  
 An curaidh crodha Conlaoch;  
 An sna murtha garrtha grinn,  
 O Dhunsgathaig go Heirinn,  
 Failte dhuit, a laoch luinn,  
 A mhacaoimh aluinn airmghrinn!

In this passage, I have marked the alliterations, which are direct and obvious, like those of the old Gothic and Welsh verse, and do not depend upon artificial classifications of the letters, as in the more recent poems of the Irish and Scots.

Miss Brooke regards the *War Odes* as the oldest of all her originals. Of these, she has favoured us with two examples. That upon *Gaul* seems to be by far the most modern of the two. It hangs upon an awkward romance, respecting a contest for precedence, between *Finn* and *Gaul*, when the Bards, apprehensive of the consequence, *shook the chain*

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\* The lamentation of Cuchullin, which concludes the poem, cannot be older than the fifteenth century. In some copies this appears as a separate piece; in others, it is connected with the rest of the poem,—*Assuitur pannus*.



*of silence*, and flung themselves among the ranks, extolling the sweets of peace, and the achievements of the combatants' ancestors, &c. The Bard, addressing the two chiefs alternately, in long strings of heroic epithets, conjures *Gaul* to submit, and *Finn* to use moderation. At length, Gaul answers the Bard in verse, and the latter concludes with an appropriate compliment.

This piece may possibly contain the substance of an old sonnet, not composed upon the spur of occasion, but written to commemorate a traditional reconciliation between the two heroes. The modern Bards, however, according to their custom, seem to have amplified it abundantly, and shaped it into a conciliatory song, adapted to the appeasing of broils, at the carousals of their chiefs. But as the measure of the old poems is preserved, we scarcely discover in it any thing of the present system of versification. There are several parts of the poem which will not divide at all into tetrastichs; and those that will admit of such distribution, frequently drop into alternate rhymes, as in these examples :—

Laoch feinnidhe fial

Is gile glor

Ni saobh achiall

Laoch aobhdha mor.

A Fhinn an fhuil tais

Ar Gholl na bris

A mheirge ni tais

Is mairg thagmhus ris.

Eire fa chios

Budh coir dha chuis

Is meanmnach bhios

Is dealbhach aghnuis, &c,

I cannot produce parallels to these stanzas from the Welsh Bards, who seem not to have been acquainted with *alternate* rhymes.

The war ode, commemorating the battle of Osgur, the son of Oisín, with Cairbre, king of Ulster, is undoubtedly the oldest of all Miss Brooke's originals. It is said to have been composed extempore, at the battle of Gabhra, in the year 296, so that the subject is intimately connected with the first book of Mr. Macpherson's *Temora*.

But the Irish appear to entertain some very romantic ideas of their ancient Bards. These gentlemen did not, surely, *rush into the very tumult of battle, accompanied with their band of performers, upon instruments of music*—they did not actually *place themselves close to the back of their patrons, catching inspiration from the scene before them, and pouring forth an ode, of eighty or a hundred regular lines, with a stentorian voice, which drowned the din of arms!* If such was the case, the strain which described the falling stroke, and animated the rising arm, however accurate in its metre, must have been not only extemporaneous, but instantaneous. And the musicians who could seize the flying words, and play in unison with these *Carmina non prius—audita*, must have been inspired with the very soul of the Bard. And this is not the whole of the difficulty which presents itself. How are we to account for the preservation of these subitaneous effusions? Ought not a couple of secre-

taries to be introduced, one at the elbow of the Bard, and the other at that of his chief harper, to take down the words and the music in short hand?

It should seem more probable, that those odes which describe the circumstances of a battle were, invariably, composed after the tumult was over. And, as Osgur did not live to hear the encomium of the Bard, the composition of the present strain may have been delayed for an age or two, till an occasion offered itself of animating some other young hero, by a recital of the song of fame.

But not to irritate the genius of Erin, it may be candidly admitted, that the ode before us, in the very structure of its verse, shews considerable marks of antiquity. For, instead of the tetrastichs of the modern Irish muse, it exhibits throughout the venerable remains of Celtic rhymes, which are often continued, without variation, for several lines together, as in the works of the old Welsh Bards. Thus we have *four* lines in *ach*, *twenty-four* in *a* and *e* ;\* *four* in *inn*, *four* in *ach*, *four* in *e*, *four* in *a*, &c.

The following is a specimen :—

Na gabh osadh uatha  
Cosguir arightha  
A Osguir eirigh fubhtha  
Tarsa agus triophtha  
Aghnnis is caoimhe crotha  
Eirigh adtus accatha  
Lean le feirg mo ghotha  
A meirg is dearg datha, &c.

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\* These two terminations are oddly mixed in the present copy; but it is probable that, originally, all these lines ended in *a*.

Was this intended for *rhyme*, or was it not? I think the answer cannot be doubtful. As for the few irregularities and defective rhymes, which we now find in the poem, they may well be supposed to have arisen from the interpolation or corruption of copies, or from the change of aspirated consonants, some of which I could point out, did I not find sufficient evidence already, to establish all that I want to prove—that rhyme was anciently used by the Irish Bards—and that the higher we ascend in the annals of Irish poetry, the less we find of the unrhymed stanzas of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, and the nearer we approach to the manner of the old Welsh Bards.

I have observed that the subject of this ode falls in with the death of Oscar, in the first book of the *Temora*. I may add that, if I have been at all successful, in picking out the meaning of the original, several of the thoughts are more happily rendered in that poem than in the translation of the Irish lady.

Mr. Smith speaks of *the death of Oscar*, which his predecessor had incorporated into his epic poem, as a separate piece, and one of the best known in the Highlands.\* In another part of his volume† he gives two extracts from this piece, by which it appears that, whilst the Irish poem, upon the combat of Oscar and Cairbar, is composed in an antiquated

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\* Galic Antiq. p. 97.

† Ibid. p. 300.

and forgotten kind of verse, that of the Highlanders exhibits the unrhymed stanzas, which were used by the Irish poets, from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century; as for example—

Donnalaich nan con remthaobh,  
 Agus buirich nan seanlaoch  
 Gul a phannail so co snitheach,  
 Sud is mo chraidh mo chroidhe.\*

Hence it appears, that the Scots had a poem upon the battle of Oscar and Cairbar, before they could boast of the *Temora*, an epic poem in eight books, and that the Irish had a poem upon the same subject, long before either of the others could have been composed.

I shall carry my inquiry after the ancient versification of the Irish but one degree farther. In the Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy, for the year 1788, Mr. O'Halloran has introduced an encomiastic poem, addressed to *Goll*, the son of *Morna*, or *Gaul*, the son of *Mirni*. This ode, according to the editor, was sung at the battle of *Cuacha*, fought A. D. 155. Whatever I may think of the date which is here assigned to the poem, or of the occasion upon which it was composed, it would be trifling to dispute with Mr. O'Halloran about the small interval of six or seven centuries. Let it suffice, that the piece is brought forward, as one of the very oldest reliques of the poetry of Erin.

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\* "The groans of aged chiefs; the howling of my dogs; the sudden bursts of the song of grief, have melted Oscar's soul,"—*Macpherson*.

And, if it be admitted that such a hero as *Gaul* ever did exist, this rhapsody, allowing for a few modernizations, and perhaps, a few interpolated lines, bids the fairest of any thing which I have seen, to be the genuine productions of his age. For here we discover the unsophisticated barbaric muse, without a shred of borrowed ornament, simple, even to rusticity, without plan, without invention, without even connection of ideas. The piece, consisting of eighty-eight short verses,\* has neither beginning, middle, nor end. It is a mere hampered string of epithets, and has hardly a single verb to hang them together.

But as to the structure of its verse, its measure, its strong alliterations, and its final rhymes, they are, in general, precisely the same as those of the early Welsh Bards. Let the reader compare them.—

*Irish.*

Goll mear mileata  
Ceap na erodhachta  
Laimh fhial arrachta  
Mian na mordhasa.

*Welsh of Aneurin.*

Gredyf gwr oed gwas  
Gwrhyt am dias  
Meirch mwth myngoras  
Y dan mordhwyt mygrwas.†

*Welsh of Taliesin.*

Mydwyv merwerydd  
Molawd Duw Dovydd  
Llwrw cyvranc cywydd  
Cyvreu dyvnwedydd.‡

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\* In this edition, two verses are crowded into one line.

† W. Archaiol. p. 1.

‡ Ibid. p. 37.

The structure of ancient British and Irish verse, being thus one and the same, I cannot persuade myself that the Bards of either country deserted their own established mode, to imitate that of the other : on the contrary, I infer, that they had equally retained the same mode, from some remote age, in which their ancestors had been better connected ; and consequently, that this was the style of versification amongst the ancient Celtic tribes, under the direction of the Druids.

What I deem another remarkable circumstance is this—Almost every line in the Irish poem, excepting a few which depart from the general laws of the verse, and are, therefore, either modernized or interpolated, may, by a mere change of orthography, be converted into pure Welsh, preserving the *sense*, the *measure*, the *alliteration*, and the *rhyme*, and exhibiting a phraseology very similar to that of Taliesin. Though not a Bard myself, I will take the liberty, in my appendix,\* of recommending a few specimens to the attention of those Irish and Galic critics, who affirm, that our language is nothing more than a depraved dialect of the Celtic. To me, it appears an evident fact, that, in the age of our unknown Bard, the Irish language had much greater analogy with this *depraved dialect*, than it has at present.

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\* No. 1.



This piece also exhibits some specimens of alternate rhyme, still preserving the alliteration, as in the following example :—

*Triath na trom channa*  
*Briathra binn mhala*  
*Mile mear dhauna*  
*Dlightheach dìongmhala, &c.*

It must not, however, be dissembled that, in the copy before me, I find twenty out of eighty-eight lines, which do not rhyme at all. Yet, I cannot entertain the smallest doubt, that this piece was, originally, composed throughout, in the same kind of full-sounding rhymes and alliteration, which were employed by the ancient Welsh Bards, and are constantly used by their successors to this day. For the occasional want of these ornaments in the poem, as it now stands, many reasons may be assigned. By a careless reciter or copyist, the lines may have been transposed, and separated from their correspondents : for the piece is of so loose a texture, that the disjointed verses may be all shaken in a bag, and placed, as they are drawn out at random, without injury to the construction or the plan. This defect in the composition may also have furnished the modern Bards with an easy opportunity to throw in a few additional epithets, to grace the character of the hero ; and as rhyme was not used in their age, it would, of course, be neglected in such interpolations. We learn from Miss Brooke, who was in the secret of the Irish antiquaries, that some recent copies of old poems exhibit several lines,

which are not to be found in others, of an earlier date. And we are informed, by the same lady, that, when a word in the ancient poems was become very obsolete, it was customary to change it for one better understood. Such changes would also be made without any regard to the preservation of rhyme, which was now got out of fashion.

Mr. O'Halloran contemplates this ode to *Goll*, in an important light, as proving, *ad instantiam crucis*, the early state of arts, letters, and civilization, in Ireland. This gentleman will not think, therefore, that I pay an ill compliment to his country, by transcribing his translation at full length. And I wish to contrast its style with that of Macpherson's Ossian.

“ Goll, vigorous and warlike. Chief of heroes ! Generous and puissant hand. Meditator of glorious deeds. Bulwark dreadful as fire. Terrible *is* thy wrath ! Champion of many battles. Royal hero. Like a lion, rapid to the attack. Ruin to the foe. Overwhelming billow. Goll frequent in action. Invincible in the most dreadful conflicts. Great in the conflicts. Warrior of increasing glory. Hero of mighty deeds. Lion, furious in action. Animating, harmonious Bard. Destroyer of councils. Puissant, all-victorious. Subduer of fierce legions. Ruin to the renowned. In anger impetuous. Admired by mighty monarchs. Chief of heavy tributes. Of all-persuasive eloquence. Bold and intrepid warrior. Unbiassed legislator. Goll of martial

pride. Strong in body. Great in arms. Courteous and polite to the legions. Fierce and powerful in action. Shield of great lustre. Flower of unfading beauty. Rapid as the mountain flood is the force of your strong arm. A sea over rivulets. Sullen in the duel. Great in the uproar of battle. Tower of strong defence. Billow over swelling seas. Goll, terrible in the shouts. Lover of constant desolation. Son of the great Morna. Patron of Bards. Respite to champions. A tribute to septs. Ruin of invaders. Prince of sure protection. Subduer of every country. Conspicuous in royal laws. Imposer of heavy tributes. Presiding in every great assembly. Unboundedly generous. Penetrating in council. Gallant issue of the great Darius. Watchful of every great charge. Of unsullied reputation. Head of the long-reigning sept. Valiant and invincible. Sea of resounding billows. Lord of high cultivations. Companion of gallant feats. Mighty are the strokes of the illustrious Goll. Vigilant commander of the legions. Deviser of exalted deeds. Fierce, all-victorious. In words, graceful and nervous. Goll, of fierce and mighty blows. Hero of rigid partition. Despoiler of the Ernains. Sword of rapid and severe execution. Hero of many contributions. Constant benefactor to Munster. A swift flowing stream. Fair as the snowy foam. Protector of Connaught. Of unbounded enterprize. Generous hero of the long flowing hair. Shield to the retreating. Commander of mighty legions. Unrivalled

in prowess. Solid and extensive support. Great in the rout of battle. Great *is* the majesty of my Goll. His glory is unsullied. My Goll is a bulwark. The spirit of close conflict."

Such is this celebrated rhapsody. Its obsolete language and antiquated verse bear testimony to its high antiquity. And why may it not, with the exception of a few sentences, be as old as the days of Gaul and his contemporary, Fingal? If it be admitted that Ireland could ever boast of such heroes, we cannot entertain a reasonable doubt, but that their age was also graced with Irish poets, such as they were. Nor can we account better for the romantic fame which those worthies acquired, in recent times, than by supposing that some fragments of their encomiastic Bards descended to posterity. This piece, surely, is not too methodical, or too classical, to be deemed one of the number.

The Irish had a written language in an earlier age than that which I assign to Gaul and Fingal. They have various remains of their national literature, preserved in manuscripts, some of which are pretty old: and they constantly affirm, that amongst these a few specimens of their ancient poetry are to be found. I know not where to ground a reasonable objection to this testimony.

The ode upon Osgur's combat, and this panegyric upon Gaul, are brought forwards as some of the very oldest remains of this kind. Their style of composition is not calculated to excite envy, nor

to encourage scepticism. They appear extremely rude and uncouth, far below the worst episode of Mr. Macpherson's *Ossian*, and by no means superior to the rustic effusions of the old Cambrian Muse, which they exactly resemble in the idiom of language and the structure of the verse.

The Irish pretend not to boast of any other kind of poetry of equal age, as exhibiting a superior style of composition. These pieces may, therefore, be regarded as rare documents of the ancient state of poetry in Ireland: for, had the art been brought to a higher degree of perfection, in an early age, we should have seen some better specimens of it. No satisfactory reason can be assigned, why all the good pieces should have perished, whilst several copies of indifferent compositions have been preserved. Those which were committed to writing, and carefully transcribed from age to age, must have been the most esteemed by the Bards and the people. They must have been those which approached nearest to their ideas of perfection—the best they had to produce.

This panegyric may, therefore, be regarded, not only as a *fair*, but a *favourable* specimen of the poetry of Ireland, in the days of Gaul, and of his contemporary Fingal. And, after we have struck out a few epithets, which do not appear consistent with the character and situation of the hero, it is precisely such as we might have expected, from the

state of society in that country, whether in the *third* or in the *ninth* century.

I am aware of an objection—It is said that the Ode addressed to Osgur, and this, to Gaul, were extemporaneous effusions, in the heat of battle. But this objection is overruled by the art and regularity of the verse, the only art which we perceive throughout the poems. The Ode on Osgur was evidently composed *after* the battle, and this compliment to Gaul carries no internal evidence, that it was composed either in a battle, or even in time of war. It appears, on the contrary, to be a cool panegyric, in which the artless Bard endeavours to recommend himself to the hero's notice, by loading him with every good quality, either for the cabinet or the field, which his rude fancy could suggest. But, even were we to grant to the antiquaries of Erin, that the Bard poured out his rhapsody in the heat of battle; in order to account for the preservation of his work, it is necessary to suppose also, that he afterwards recollected his thoughts at an hour of leisure, and committed them to writing, or else, recited them to some persons, who could duly attend to the song of fame, and treasure it in their memory. Is it likely, that during this favourable interval, the poet did not correct the errors of hasty effusion, and make as good a thing as he could of his poem, both to do credit to himself and to his patron? This cannot be supposed.

But if such was the genuine poetry of the Irish Bards, in the age of these heroes, it is evident that the genuine works of Ossian, had they reached our times, must have presented us with something of the same kind. For whether that Bard be classed amongst the luminaries of Erin or of Caledonia, he must have found the state of society, and of the arts, nearly the same, in either situation. The two countries were inhabited by tribes of the same people, who spoke the same language, and had their arts, manners, and customs, in common.

The poems published by Mr. Macpherson, and his own notes upon them, represent the state of poetry, in the days of Ossian, as being exactly upon a level in both countries. Hence he makes his author introduce long and eventful episodes of the Irish Bards, into his Caledonian poems.\* These episodes, so totally different in the style of their composition, from the genuine poetry of the ancient Irish, are undoubtedly spurious: and the poems which contain them are as evidently the productions of a more cultivated age.

When we have the good fortune to discover any genuine remains of old Caledonian poetry, we must not expect to be reminded of the model of Homer and the rules of Aristotle; nor even to contemplate

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\* See the Song of *Althan*, which occupies seven pages, in the first book of *Temora*—the Song of Cathmor's Bard, in the second book, &c.

If the works of Ossian are authentic, these passages contain genuine Irish songs.



the artificial stanzas of the late Irish Bards, but the verse which these rude poems exhibit, and which, like that of our ancestors, is adorned with full-sounding and long-continued rhyme. How absurdly, then, does the daughter of the modern Irish muse reproach the Cambro-Britons with the use of rhyme, which was the favourite decoration of her own great grandmother! Had the wardrobe of this assuming lady contained any ancient family habits, we should, undoubtedly, have distinguished the true Celtic fringe. And, even now, we may perceive a few old fashioned shreds hanging about her, of which the stately dame herself seems to be totally unconscious.

I shall not insist upon the old oracular verse respecting the fatal stone, which is quoted by Toland and Borlase. Its rhymes are very good, but they may, possibly, be of Irish manufacture. Nor shall I lay much stress upon those stanzas of Ossian, in Mr. Smith's specimens, which have natural rhymes between the second and fourth line. For, as the Highland Bards copied the Irish metres of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, they may be supposed to have blundered upon all their peculiarities. But the author of the *Galic Antiquities* exposes to our view something more to the purpose.

Twenty lines of *Ossian's* poem, entitled *Dargo*, are introduced as specimens, with this preface,—  
“ Such has been the fate of the Galic poetry, that  
“ its most beautiful passages are, generally, those  
“ which have been most objected to. To suppress

“ any of them, on this account, would be as cowardly, as it would be presumptuous, to treat the prejudices against them with indifference. Every body has as much right, in this case, to judge for himself, as the translator has, who does all he can to put this in their power, by laying before them the words of the original.” Twelve of these lines, which exemplify the *very best manner of Ossian*, are as follows :—

Tha codhail nan cathan ann sith  
 'S iad air sgiathan na doininn gun strith,  
 Gun bheum-sgeithe gun fharum lainne  
 'N co'nuidh thosdach na caomh-chlainne.  
 Tha sliochd Lochlinn is Fhinn gu h'ard,  
 Ag eisdeachd caithream nan aona bhàrd.  
 An uigh cho'n eil tuille ri strì  
 'S gun nireas' air sìotian no fri'.  
 Mar sgeul nam blianaì' chaidh seach  
 Air iteig aonaich le'n ciar-dhreach,  
 Tha aisling na beatha dhuibh's a Fhlaithibh:  
 Mar tha dhamhsa Dearg nan cathaibh.\*

Here we have twelve lines of *Ossian*, taken from one favourite passage, which rhyme not, indeed, precisely in the manner of the old Welsh and Irish poems, but exactly like the couplets of Dryden and Pope. If these are genuine, the Bard of Selma was no stranger to the use of rhyme; if they are not genuine, Scotland has produced some unknown Bard in recent times, who could successfully personate his character. However this may be, as it appears that rhyme was a general ornament of

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\* Galic Antiq. p. 290.

ancient Celtic poetry, such passages as these exhibit the best title to antiquity that Ossian has to produce. If ever he deigns to descend from the shades of the fourth century to pay us a visit, without this credential, he will be deservedly regarded with suspicion and distrust. But as the absence of rhyme is thought to contribute to the credit of the royal Bard, there can be little doubt but that the care of editors will knock off most of his remaining shackles, before they introduce his larger poems to the public. And how easily may the rhyme and the measure be disguised in any language!

The lamb which thy riot dooms to bleed this morning,  
Had he but thy knowledge, would he skip and play!  
Pleas'd to the last, he crops the flow'ry pasture,  
And licks the hand that is just rais'd to shed his blood.

In the printed specimens of the poems ascribed to Ossian, it were easy to point out perversions, somewhat like the above, whether accidental or designed, I know not. The author of the *Galic Antiquities* introduces a favourite passage, with the following remark:—"The Galic reader will wish to see these lines in their native terror."

Le sgreadail an lanna garbha  
'S le caoiribh teine o'n cruaidh arma;  
Chulr iad iasg nan cuantaidh stuadhach,  
Ann an caoilte caola fuara.  
Chuir iad feidh nam beanntaidh arda  
Gus na gleanntaidh fuara fasail;  
'S eunlaith bhinn-fhoclach nan coillteach,  
Anns na speuran le crith-oillte.\*

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\* *Galic Antiq.* p. 302.

In these verses we have evident remains of such alliterations and rhyme as were employed by the ancient Bards of Ireland and Wales ; but the rhyme is broken, and the construction injured by the change of a few letters. For *stuardhach*, ridge, in the third line, let us read *stuardha*, *ridges*: restore the adjective to its natural situation in the sixth line, by reading *fasail fuara*: for *coillteach*, *wooddy*, in the seventh line, read *coillte*, *woods*; the rhyme will be perfectly restored, and the sense will be rendered perspicuous.—

At the crash of rigid swords,  
And fiery sparks from steel armour,  
The fish of the bays, between the hills, retire  
To the narrow, cool straits :  
The deer of the lofty mountains retire  
To the desert, and cold vallies ;  
And the sweet-singing birds of the woods,  
Towards the sky, with trembling tenor.

Whatever the Scots have borrowed from the poetry and tales of the Irish, they have generally improved. This people must, therefore, possess genius, and taste for poetry ; and there can be no doubt, but that they had poets of their own for many ages. When they bring forward passages which bear the genuine stamp of old Celtic verse, and Celtic composition, it will readily be admitted, that they have preserved some fragments of their national Bards for four or five centuries, which is, perhaps, as long as poetry can exist by oral tradition. But when the modern critics reject every appearance

of rhyme, they deprive the Galic songs of all pretensions to credit for remote antiquity.

As to the authenticity and genuineness of Ossian's poems, I have now delivered my opinion candidly and freely. I am far from wishing to bias the judgment of others. Let my Essay be regarded as anonymous, but let my reasons be weighed. I have only stated what occurred to my own mind, as objections to the high degree of historical importance which some writers have attached to these poems. If these objections can be fairly set aside, so far from being an obstinate adversary, I shall rejoice in having occasioned a full vindication of the most elegant effusions of the Celtic muse.

It was my intention to have added a section, upon the subject of the Caledonian language, with a view to discuss its title to the emphatical name of THE CELTIC; but as such inquiries excite little interest, I shall conclude with a few short observations.

Prior to the publication of the translated Ossian, the *Erse* or *Galic* of Scotland was regarded, both at home and abroad, merely as the *patois* of the Irish. But since it has pretended to the preservation of heroic poems of the third and fourth century, *in the living voice of the people*, it has aspired to a higher rank: it now affects to be styled emphatically, THE CELTIC, whilst the Irish, Welsh, &c. are degraded and considered as depraved dialects. It may be worth inquiry, how this degree of pre-

eminence is to be supported, by the language of Caledonia, if the voice of Ossian should fail.

Mr. Macpherson tells us—"The first circumstance that induced me to disregard the *vulgarly received* opinion, of the Hibernian extraction of the Scottish nation, was my observations on their ancient language. That dialect of the Celtic tongue, spoken in the north of Scotland, is much more pure, more agreeable to its mother language, and more abounding with primitives, than that now spoken, or even that which has been written, for some centuries back, amongst the most unmixed part of the Irish nation."

Were all this admitted, it does not follow, that Scotland must needs be the mother country. In the last six hundred years, the Irish may have been more mixed with strangers than the northern Caledonians have been. The *Icelanders* are said to have preserved their ancient tongue better than the inhabitants of the mother country; yet this has not been adduced as an argument for deriving the Norwegians from Iceland.

But the purity of the Galic does not appear from the printed specimens of Ossian, which abound with words analogous to terms of the Latin language, and of the Gothic dialects. Of its advantage over the Irish, in the abundance of primitives, a stranger cannot well judge, as the terms of both dialects are huddled together, without distinction, in their common dictionary. But Mr. Shaw's account of his

labours, in collecting *vocables*, does not seem to favour the above assertion.

And how does Mr. Macpherson compare his Galic with the mother tongue? It is not easy to procure an authentic and connected specimen of the ancient Celtic of Gaul, unless it be found in the Armorican; and, in that case, the Welsh and Cornish would step in long before the Galic or Irish. By the *mother tongue*, the author, perhaps, means only the *language of Ossian*—then his assertion amounts to nothing more than this, that the Galic is more similar to itself than to a foreign dialect. But to proceed—

“A Scotchman, tolerably conversant in his own language, understands an Irish composition, from that derivative analogy which it has to the Galic of North Britain. An Irishman, on the other hand, without the aid of study, can never understand a composition in the Galic tongue.”

If the Scotchman here described, can read any Galic at all, he must necessarily understand Irish: for Mr. Shaw, in the introduction to his grammar, informs us, that he could find no books but Irish, and a few late tracts, which were written in imitation of that dialect: and in the introduction to his dictionary, he asserts further, that the Irish *has always been the written and studied language*. A Scotchman may, therefore, be supposed to understand the language which he reads, or is in the habit of hearing others read, and which is studied in his country, much better than an Irishman can comprehend the



neglected idiom of the Scottish populace. A provincial labourer in England, understands the question of a stranger who addresses him in plain English; but the latter often finds it difficult to make out the meaning of the peasant's answer. Let us hear the author out—

“The Irish, however backward they may be to allow any thing to the prejudice of their antiquity, seem, inadvertently, to acknowledge it, in the very appellation they give to the dialect they speak.—They call their own language *Caelic Eirinach*, i. e. Caledonian Irish, when, on the contrary, they call the dialect of North Britain, *a Chaelic*, or, the Caledonian tongue, emphatically.”\*

If I may trust the dictionaries of the language, this designation is not perfectly accurate. Mr. Shaw interprets *Gaoidhal*, “an Irishman, a Highlander of Scotland;” and *Gaoidhleag*, “the Irish, Gaelic, or old Celtic tongue.” If priority, in the order of declaration, implies emphasis, it is here introduced in favour of the Irish. The Welsh apply the terms *Gwydel*, and *Gwyddelaeg*, to the *Irishman* and his language exclusively.

Mr. Shaw, in the introduction to his dictionary, speaks of the Galic, as *the greatest monument of antiquity now in the world: as the language of Japhet, spoken before the deluge, and, probably,*

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\* Diss. on the Poems of Ossian.

*the speech of paradise!* These are high pretensions. But how does the author prove the originality of the Highland dialect, and its preeminence over the Irish?

He tells us that *it wants that variety of inflections and terminations, which we find in the latter.*—This argument will not hold good in parallel instances. The country of the Greeks was overrun by Barbarians. The people, in consequence, became rude: their noble language lost its inflections; and they now form the tenses of their verbs by the aid of auxiliaries. The same thing happened to Rome and her provinces: the various terminations of the Latin nouns have, consequently vanished, in the modern Italian, French, and Spanish. Our Saxon ancestors used a variety of inflections and terminations; but, for some centuries after the Norman conquest, their language was abandoned to the populace: when it began to re-emerge into fashion, about the time of Edward the Third, it appeared to have been stripped of most of its terminations. The patois of our present English has still fewer terminations than the standard language. In the rustic idiom we hear the verbs *gets, has, does, &c.* carried through all the persons of both numbers, without variation. What is the inference from these examples?

Are the present dialects of the Greek and Roman languages more *original* and *pure* than those of the classical writers? Is the modern English older than

the Anglo-Saxon, or the jargon of the peasant than the written English? If not, why should we think the Erse more original and pure than the Irish, when we discover that it wants several formative inflections, which the other has retained? Shall we not rather say that men, during a retrograde lapse in the scale of society, find themselves possessed of a language too precise for their use, and naturally drop into a simple and slovenly mode of expressing their contracted ideas.

And such is the state in which Mr. Shaw represents the Caledonians. Their country was once the seat of government, and their language, that of the court. The government has been removed; and the language, long since neglected, even by the natives. Let us hear this gentleman's detail of simple facts, relative to the state in which he found the language when he published his grammar, in 1778.—“ In this situation I found the Galic—with  
“ few books, and fewer manuscripts, in the living  
“ voice of many thousands, *who entirely neglected*  
“ *it.*”\* Not one manuscript is named or described; and the only books were, the *Irish* translation of the Bible, the *Confession of Faith*, and the *Psalms in Metre*, both imitations of the Irish dialect. To these are added two or three collections of songs, and Baxter's Call—*all of which are wretchedly orthographed.*

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\* Introd. to the Gram. p. 8.

“ At present, I much doubt (continues the author),  
 “ whether there be four men in Scotland, that would  
 “ spell one page the same way ; for it has hitherto  
 “ been left to the caprice and judgment of every  
 “ speaker, without the steadiness of analogy, or  
 “ direction of rules. The taste at this day, of the  
 “ clergy, a learned and respectable order, is to  
 “ understand the English, content with what Galic  
 “ enables them to translate a sermon, they originally  
 “ wrote in English. And though they are obliged  
 “ to speak in public once in seven days, there are  
 “ not five ministers in Scotland, who write their  
 “ discourses in their own tongue ; yet there are  
 “ several ambitious to be reputed the translators of  
 “ a few lines of Galic poetry.\* Conceiving an early  
 “ taste for Galic—I thought, for my own private  
 “ amusement, of subjecting it to certain rules, to  
 “ be observed when I had occasion to speak it, an  
 “ undertaking which, without any precedent, I  
 “ thought at first impracticable.—Considering a  
 “ Galic Grammar as an addition to the stores of  
 “ literature—I was encouraged to persevere in at-  
 “ tempting to do *what was never done before*.”†—  
 “ To reduce to rule a language without books,  
 “ and having no standard but the judgment of  
 “ every speaker, is an undertaking, perhaps, ad-  
 “ venturous.” &c.

This, surely, is the picture of a corrupt and  
 expiring jargon of the populace, rather than of a

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\* Introd. to the Gram. p. 11.

† Ibid. p. 13.

pure and original language. Mr. Shaw, however, did persevere. He attempted to frame and establish a Galic orthography, *founded on the general philosophy of language*.—This proved, at last, to be a close imitation of the Irish, excepting that some aspirated consonants, which custom had rendered quiescent, were discarded, and those only retained which were necessary to preserve the etymology, and express the sounds of words. Having completed this process, the grammarian, rather prematurely, introduces a compliment on his native language, as possessing a more commodious system of orthography than the Irish.—“Unlike the Irish, the Scots “Galic delights to pronounce every letter, and is “not bristled over with so many useless and quiescent consonants.”

Soon after the publication of his grammar, this gentleman felt an impulse to attempt snatching from oblivion the Galic tongue, *which was now in her last struggles for existence*.—He began to collect materials for his dictionary.

In the Highlands, there being few books, and still fewer manuscripts, in the Scotch dialect, *the language in the living voice was the only source*, from which he could gather *vocables*. Having extorted from a niggardly populace, *who would not open their mouths without being first paid*, a few oral mites of the language of *Japhet*, of the *antediluvians*, and of *paradise*, which were only current from hill to hill, amongst the defiles of Caledonia, he went over into Ireland. Here he found a language

rich in manuscripts, and cultivated by men of learning—here he finished his collection; and here he is compelled to abandon his philosophical system of Galic orthography.

“ The Galic reader will find no innovations in orthography; for I have considered it my business, rather to record words, as they have been written in the ancient Irish manuscripts, than attempt to write a dictionary, *by altering the spelling from the received method, to what I might conceive it ought to be, according to the powers of the letters and the philosophy of language.—The Irish dialect has always been the written and the studied language.*”\*

Such a view of the expiring dialect of Caledonia, taken by its national lexicographer, and its first, if not only grammarian, must, undoubtedly, derogate from its lately assumed pretensions. The circumstances and facts here recited, would have deserved Mr. Smith’s attention, when he was compiling *a History of the Druids*, founded upon Galic etymologies, not to mention the numberless dissertations, sketches, and criticisms, which, since the appearance of Mr. Macpherson’s *Ossian*, have swarmed and buzzed in the atmosphere of letters. Unsupported by the genuine works of the Bard of Selma, the Galic must, in my humble opinion, return to the station which it occupied fifty years ago, and be content to rank as a *patois* of the Irish language.

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\* Introd. to Shaw’s Dict.

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## SECTION V.

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## SECTION V.

### FIRST ADDITIONAL.

*On the general evidence disclosed in those volumes which contain the original Galic.*



The originals taken only from copies in Macpherson's hand writing---this circumstance not calculated to remove suspicion.---Search Sir John Sinclair's Dissertation for better arguments---the authorities quoted from Buchanan, Johnston, &c. wholly irrelevant.---Testimonies of authors, upon Scotch tradition, prove that the character of Fingal, as drawn in these poems, was unknown before the middle of the seventeenth century---the argument drawn from the names of places, &c. inconclusive---the account given of MSS. too general and indistinct to decide any thing---testimony of the Danish historian perfectly nugatory---the laws of the metre, which are supposed to have assisted the memory---proved to be founded in the modern prosody and orthography of the Irish---the poems, therefore, of recent composition.

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HAVING stated, in the preceding pages, some circumstances, in Macpherson's translation, and its attendant dissertations and notes, that appear unfavourable to Ossian's claim of high antiquity, and historical credit, I now proceed briefly to consider the evidence of the recent publication which announces the Galic originals.

This long promised work has, at length, come forth, in three volumes, royal octavo, bearing the following title:—"The poems of Ossian, in the  
" original Gaelic, with a literal translation into  
" Latin, by the late Robert Macfarlan, A. M. together with a Dissertation on the authenticity of the  
" poems, by Sir John Sinclair, Bart. ; and a translation from the Italian of the Abbè Cesarotti's  
" Dissertation, on the controversy respecting the  
" authenticity of Ossian, with notes, and a supplemental Essay, by John Mc. Arthur, LL. D.  
" Published under the sanction of the Highland  
" society in London." 1807.

These respectable names, by which the *Galic Bard* is introduced to the public, may be viewed as a certain pledge, that in the work before us, his cause has obtained all the solid support it is capable of receiving. And this support is deemed amply

sufficient to withstand all the objections that have been made, or can be made, against the credit of these poems: for Sir John Sinclair concludes his dissertation, by declaring his *trust*, that he has established *two important propositions*, which *he hopes can no longer be questioned*: namely, “ 1. “ That the poems of Ossian are authentic, ancient “ poetry; and 2. That, in a remote period of our “ history, the mountains of Scotland produced a “ Bard, whose works must render his name immortal, “ and whose genius has not been surpassed, by the “ efforts of any modern, or even ancient competitor.” (Signed) “ JOHN SINCLAIR.”

It will therefore be proper for me, with candour and attention, to weigh the chief arguments in this dissertation, that I may discover how far it may be expedient to alter or retract the opinion I have already formed, or in what particulars I may still persist in maintaining it. But, previous to this, I must state a few general facts, which may give the reader an easy introduction into the subjects before him.

The editors of the present work direct their chief efforts to prove, that the Galic poems did not originate with Mr. Macpherson—that poems composed in that language, and ascribed to Ossian, were known in Scotland, before his time; and that he collected such poems from MSS. and oral tradition. All this is admissible; but having established these points, our editors assume as a necessary consequence,

that the poems published by Mr. Macpherson are ancient and authentic. Such arguments, and the facts upon which they rest, may be effectually directed against those critics who maintain that the tales relative to the affairs of the Fingalians, were the pure invention of Mr. Macpherson ; but I cannot perceive their force, in ascertaining the genuineness and antiquity of the poems in question. They may be Galic poems of some standing, and yet not the work of Ossian, or of a remote age.

Be that as it may, this publication will not go far, in proving the identity of the present collection, as to its verse and phraseology, with the *genuine recitals* of the aged Highlanders: or, if that identity, in general, be supposed, it will not enable us to judge of the alterations which the poems may have undergone in the translator's hands: for the Galic text is wholly derived, with some orthographical corrections, from papers which Mr. Macpherson had left behind him, at his death, *in his own hand writing*; and the originals of *eleven* of the poems are wanting,\* because no *Galic copies of them were found amongst his papers*. We are, indeed, told, in an advertisement prefixed to the first volume, that such deficiencies *might have been supplied from other manuscripts, or oral tradition; but that the committee appointed to superintend the printing of this*

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\* Namely---Oithona---The War of Caros---Cathlin of Clutha---Sulmala of Lumon---The War of Inisthona---The Songs of Selma---Lathmon---Darthula---The Death of Cuthullin---The Battle of Lora, and Berrathon.

*work, were scrupulous about making any addition to the manuscripts left by Mr. Macpherson.*

This scruple, surely, was ill judged. The editors must have been aware of the prevailing suspicion, that Macpherson had kept back his promised publication so many years, for no other reason but to gain time, that he might finish his Galic compositions. Had the supplemental originals been given to the public, by these gentlemen, to whose characters no suspicion has attached, it might be presumed, they could not have injured the cause of Ossian. If these deficiencies can yet be supplied, it will be *well*; but if they had been supplied at once, and without hesitation, it would have been *much better*.

In spite of all suspicions, I can freely declare, as an individual, that I never questioned Mr. Macpherson's veracity, when he thought proper to speak out. I never doubted that he produced the poems from materials of that very kind which he professed to have received; namely, a variety of traditional tales in prose, and fragments of verse, which bore the name of Ossian, and which this gentleman collected either from the mouths of the people, or from written copies of recent dates. But he has not told us plainly how much these materials were improved under his direction; and I regret that the editors of the present work afford me no opportunity of correcting the opinion I had formed upon this subject, from a few of Macpherson's mysterious hints, combined with the evidence of Mr. Smith.\* Here

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\* Author of the Galic Antiq. now *Doctor Smith*.

is not one paragraph, here is not a single line collated with any copy prior to Mr. Macpherson's collection.

Let us then proceed to consider the principal arguments of Sir John Sinclair, for the authenticity of these poems.

In the first chapter, our respectable author proposes—"A statement of the evidence adduced in behalf of the authenticity of Ossian's poems, independently of the Gaelic originals being now published, with some observations on the objections which have been urged against their authenticity."

This subject is opened with a remark—"That the Celtic tribes, in general, were addicted to poetry, and accustomed to preserve, in verse, whatever they considered to be peculiarly entitled to remembrance." To this succeeds an inquiry—"Whether various Gaelic poems did not exist in the Highlands, and Islands of Scotland, in remote periods of our history."

Here the affirmative, in general terms, may be granted without hesitation: for it is well known that the Celts had their Bards; and no good reason can be assigned, why the Highlanders should not have had their poets, as well as the Irish, the Welsh, and other kindred tribes. But as this part of the Dissertation adduces some authorities, which are thought to allude particularly to the poems before us, it may be proper to consider the scope and com-

prehension of those authorities. The celebrated Buchanan observes, that *the Bards were held in great honour, both among the Gauls and Britons, and that their function and name doth yet remain amongst all the nations which use the old British tongue*—in which the Highlanders of Scotland are certainly included. He adds—“ They compose  
 “ poems, and those not inelegant, which the rhapsodists recite, either to the better sort, or to the  
 “ vulgar, who are very desirous to hear them; and  
 “ sometimes they sing them to musical instruments.”

This circumstance is still more strongly stated, in the description given, by the same distinguished author, of the Hebrides, or Western Islands. He there mentions that the inhabitants of those islands  
 “ Sing poems not inelegant, containing commonly  
 “ the eulogies of valiant men; and their Bards  
 “ usually treat of no other subject.”\*

These extracts of the historian furnish our author with an opportunity to urge the following questions:  
 “ Is it possible that such a judge of literary merit  
 “ as Buchanan, should have bestowed such praise  
 “ on the works of the *ancient* Scottish Bards, if  
 “ they had not been justly entitled to his applause;

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\* The words of Buchanan are these:---“ Carmina autem non inculta  
 “ fundunt, quæ rhapsodi proceribus, aut vulgo, audiendi cupido, recitant,  
 “ aut ad musicos organorum modos canunt.”---“ Accinunt autem carmen  
 “ non inconcinne factum, quod ferè laudes fortium virorum contineat; nec  
 “ aliud ferè argumentum eorum bardi tractant.”



“ and if such poems actually existed in his time,  
 “ and were recited by the Bards, from memory,  
 “ where is the impossibility of their being handed  
 “ down for one hundred and fifty, or two hundred  
 “ years longer? Or is it to be considered as in-  
 “ credible, that those very poems which the most  
 “ elegant classical scholar of modern times should  
 “ consider as *non inculta, non inconcinnè facta*,  
 “ should turn out to be the identical poems, which  
 “ have since been so justly celebrated as the com-  
 “ positions of Ossian?”

In this passage our author affirms nothing; but  
 if I may hazard a remark, he seems by his mode of  
 reasoning, to carry his conclusions a great way  
 beyond his premises.

Buchanan, in the first quotation, only speaks of  
 the Bards of the Celtic tribes in general, Irish and  
 Welsh, as well as Scotch: and if he alludes to any  
 particular poems, it is evident, from his manner of  
 expression, that he does not mean *ancient* poems,  
 but the compositions of the very age in which he  
 wrote. The Bards COMPOSE poems, which the  
 rhapsodists RECITE. The *authors* as well as the  
*reciters* are persons of the historian's own times.  
 The latter quotation certainly alludes to Scottish  
 poems; still, however, they are the works of  
 Buchanan's own contemporaries. They are the  
 poems which the Bards *are now composing*, the  
 subjects of which they *now treat*. If, therefore, it  
 should *turn out*, that Buchanan's *Carmina non*

*inculta, non inconcinne facta*, are the identical poems which have *since* been celebrated as the compositions of Ossian, what must follow? Why, that we have good historical authority to fix their date, not in the conclusion of the third century, or the beginning of the fourth, but in the middle of the sixteenth. But however, as Buchanan has not named the Bard, nor any one of his poems, nor quoted a single verse, nor specified either of his subjects, we have still to regret that Ossian's claim to this moderate portion of antiquity, is not supported by an authority so respectable.

Sir John Sinclair's next authority is contained in this quotation from Johnston:—" Although it is  
 " well known, that the Scots had always more  
 " strength and industry to perform great deeds,  
 " than care to have them published to the world;  
 " yet in ancient times they had, and held in great  
 " esteem, their own *Homers* and *Maros*, whom they  
 " named Bards. These recited the achievements of  
 " their brave warriors, in heroic measures, adapted  
 " to the musical notes of the harp; with these they  
 " roused the minds of those present, to the glory  
 " of virtue, and transmitted patterns of fortitude to  
 " posterity. This order of men do still exist,  
 " amongst the Welsh and ancient Scots, and they  
 " still retain that name in their native language."\*

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\* The original runs thus:—" Quamvis intelligunt omnes, plus semper  
 " virium et industriæ Scotis fuisse ad res agendas, quam commentationis ad  
 " prædicandas, habuerunt tamen antiquitus, et coluerunt, suos Homeros et

Great stress is laid upon the “Homers and Maros” of this passage, but it seems to me that the author means nothing more than to assert in general, that the ancient *Scots* (a name which embraces the Irish and the Highlander) as well as other Celtic tribes, had their Bards; that the subjects of these Bards were often martial; and that, amongst the Welsh and Scots, the order was not extinct, in his time. Had Johnston known any thing of the *Fingal*, the *Temora*, and other poems, which are now ascribed to Ossian, he could not have affirmed that the Scots always had more vigour in performing than in celebrating great deeds; and if he knew nothing of these poems, his testimony can afford no support to the Bard of Selma. In describing the office of the Bards and the character of their compositions, he does not seem to have his eye, so much, upon these celebrated compositions, or upon any national subject whatsoever, as, upon the words of *Ammianus Marcellinus*—“Bardi fortia virorum illustrium facta, heroicis composita versibus, cum dulcibus lyre modulis cantitarunt.” Here is the fountain from which Johnston draws his supply of panegyric. Why then has not Sir John Sinclair quoted the original author, a *Roman Historian*, who wrote of

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“Marones, quos Bardos nominabant. Hi fortium virorum facta versibus heroicis et lyre modulis aptata concinebant; quibus et presentium animos acuebant ad virtutis gloriam, et fortitudinis exempla ad posteros trans mittebant. Cujusmodi apud Cambros et priscos Scotos nec dum desiere; et nomen illud patrio sermone adhuc retinent.”

those very battles, which Fingal is reported to have fought, and Ossian sung? But if Ammianus, in his encomium upon the Bards, does not celebrate the strains of Ossian, we cannot suppose them to have been celebrated by his copyist, Johnston, who, had he been apprized of the preservation and high antiquity of such national treasures, was too precise a writer, and too good a patriot, to have delivered himself in these common-place descriptions, and to have lumped together the *Welsh* and *Scots* Bards, in the manner he does. Neither Buchanan, therefore, nor Johnston, can be supposed to add a single leaf to the garland of the venerable Ossian. The authorities of three other writers are brought forward: but as they all wrote below the middle of the *eighteenth* century; and as they are adduced only to prove the existence of Galic poetry, previous to Mr. Macpherson's publications, in 1760, 1761, &c. we need not stop to consider their evidence.

In the third section of this chapter, a variety of testimonies are produced, with a view to prove that *Fingal*, *Ossian*, &c. were Scots and not Irishmen. Of these, it will be proper to take some notice, as far as they may seem to apply to the great question, respecting the genuineness of the Galic poems.

*John Barbour*, in a poem called "The Bruce," composed about the year 1375, incidentally mentions our hero, by the name of *Fyngal*. This is deemed a circumstance of considerable importance, as appears by the words of our author:—"It is

“ singular that, in this most ancient of the Scottish  
 “ works, in any respect connected with this sub-  
 “ ject, the hero should be called by the name of  
 “ *Fingal*; whereas in Ireland, he is uniformly dis-  
 “ tinguished by the name of *Finn*.” (Fionn.) To  
 this passage is subjoined the following note:—  
 “ Pinkerton, in his Enquiry, v. ii. p. 73, 74, remarks  
 “ it as a circumstance difficult to be accounted for,  
 “ that the name of Fingal is unknown to the Irish,  
 “ and that the Scotch alone give the hero that  
 “ appellation.” Here we seem to have a just cri-  
 terion, whereby we may distinguish between Irish  
 and Scotch tradition. If the Highlanders are con-  
 tented to abide by this test, we shall soon perceive  
 the consequences that must follow.

*Hector Boethius* says—“ Some conjecture that  
 “ in those times lived *Finnan* the son of *Cælus*  
 “ (in common language, *Fyn Mac Coul*), a man, as  
 “ they report, of an incredible stature, for they  
 “ describe him as being seven cubits in height. He  
 “ was of *Scottish* extraction, remarkable for the art  
 “ of hunting, and, in other exercises, to be dreaded,  
 “ on account of his unusual size of body.”

Here I must stop to make a few remarks, which  
 will also apply to some of the following quotations.  
 Instead of the Scottish name *Fingal*, we perceive the  
 Irish *Fyn*; instead of the amiable *hero*, a monstrous  
*giant*; instead of the magnanimous and accom-  
 plished *warrior*, a ferocious *hunter*, formidable only

on account of his savage disposition and enormous corporeal strength. This is not the *Fingal* of the Galic poems: and the tradition of Scotland, two or three hundred years ago, being of a character so very inconsistent with those poems, instead of supporting their claim to antiquity, must be regarded as throwing great weight into the opposite scale.

Again: *Bishop Leslie* informs us—"It is the opinion of many, that one Finnanus the son of Cœlus (in our language, *Fyn* ma Coul), a man of a huge size, and sprung, as it were, from the race of ancient giants, at that time (namely, in the reign of Eugenius II.) lived amongst us." Here again the *giant* of fabulous tradition answers to his Irish name *Fyn*, and it is of this portentous character and his Lieutenant, Gaul, the son of Morni, that *Bishop Douglas* thus expresses himself in his "Palice of Honour:"—

"Greit Gow Mac Morne, and *Fyn* Mac Coul, and how

"*They suld be* GODDIS IN IRELAND as they say."

The giant *Fyn*, whom ancient tradition acknowledges as a DEMIGOD of the pagan Irish, is thus described in another poem, written about the time of James IV. and entitled *The Interlude of Droichis*:—

"My fore grandsyr hecht *Fyn* Mac Cowl,

"That dang the Devil, and gart him yowll,

"The skyis rained when he wald scowll,

"And trublit all the air:

"He gat my grandschir Gog Magog;

"Ay when he dansit, the world wald schog,

"Five thousand ellis yeid in his frog,

"Of Hieland pladdis of hair,"

This, surely, is not the picture of that most amiable and refined hero, who is celebrated in the poems published by Mr. Macpherson. For my own part, I must acknowledge that I cannot recognize a single feature of his character, as delineated in those compositions, till we come down to the writers of the seventeenth century. Here *Colville*, in his “Whig’s Supplication,” published in 1681, condescends to place him upon a level with certain heroes of the human race:—

“ One man, quoth he, oft times hath stood,  
 “ And put to flight a multitude,  
 “ Like Samson, Wallace, and Sir Bewis,  
 “ And Fyn Mac Cowl, beside the *Lewis*.”\*

We also find that *Kirk*, in 1684, commemorates *the generous land of the heroes of FINGAL*, or *Fionn*, as the name is written in this author’s original. But even after this, *Nicolson*, in an Essay, written anno 1702, takes notice of an old romance, *of the valour and feats of Fin Mc. Cowl, a giant of prodigious stature*.

Upon these *testimonies of Scottish writers*, I would make a few obvious remarks.—In the first place, then, it must be granted to the worthy Baronet, that Scotland puts in her claim to some romantic traditions, relative to *Fin Mac Coul*. But the language of all the authors here quoted, down to the middle of the seventeenth century, at least, leave a strong impression upon the reader’s mind,

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\* That is, the Island of *Lewis*; one of the Hebrides.



that not one of the authors here quoted, knew, or had even heard of the poems, now ascribed to Ossian. The general tradition of Scotland uniformly represents *Fingal*, or rather *Fin*, as a monstrous giant, a heathen god, or a powerful and terrific demon, *that troubled all the air*. This representation must have originated in wild and grotesque fiction, of a character totally different from the fine effusions of the Galic muse. And it may fairly be inferred, that the poems in question did not exist, or were utterly unknown, in the ages when these fictions were invented, and during the whole period of their popularity. For if the son of Fingal celebrated the wars of his father, *his* songs must have been prior, in time, to the composition of the grotesque romances. And if the poems of Ossian have been preserved, from the third or fourth century, to the present age, by *oral tradition*, they must have been highly popular, in every intervening age: for the nature of oral tradition is such, that it cannot lay down a tale for five hundred years, and then take it up again. The chain must be unbroken, or it is utterly lost.

If Ossian's poems have been preserved by oral tradition, they must have taken a strong and immediate hold upon the minds of the people, and have maintained that hold uninterruptedly, through every succeeding age. Wherefore, upon the supposition that Ossian's poems are genuine, there could have been no age, subsequent to their composition, in

which the truth of their story was so far obliterated, as to give place to the popular reception of lawless fable.

But it appears by the testimony of the authors here cited, that the Scotch nation, from the earliest notice they take of *Fingal* or *Fin*, down to the seventeenth century, knew nothing of his character, but as a giant hunter, a demigod, or a *foul fiend*; whence it is evident, that the romantic fiction did *prevail* among the people, and that the story of the poems was utterly unknown. Therefore the poems did not exist in popular tradition, during those ages of romance, and consequently, they must be regarded as the fabrication of more recent times: for it is not even pretended, that they were preserved in writing.

Again: in Macpherson's *Gaelic Ossian*, the great hero of the poems is generally distinguished by the name *Fionnghal*, *Fingal*. If these poems were the genuine composition of Ossian; if they remained in the mouths of the people, from the third to the eighteenth century, they must have constituted the very foundation of the mighty warrior's fame; they must be regarded as the pure source from which the national tradition was supplied. And whilst the old Highlanders cultivated their acquaintance with the hero, through the medium of these poems, it is impossible they should have forgotten his proper name, as consecrated to posterity by their venerable Bard: it is also highly improbable, that popular

tradition should have substituted any other name for this distinguished character, the glory of Caledonia, and the mirror of heroism. Yet we find that Scotch tradition, invariably, excepting in one solitary instance, designates him by the appellation of *Fionn*, or *Fin Mac Coul*, which the Galic scholars of the present day regard as his Irish name.

If we expunge a single passage in Barbour's poem, we know of no writer whatsoever, prior to Macpherson, who has announced to the public the name of Fingal. And as Barbour's verse required a name of two syllables only, I am greatly mistaken if his *Fyngal* is any thing more than a contraction of Fyn Mac Coul, omitting the *Mac*, and softening the *c* into *g*, agreeably to the genius of the Galic language. The Scotch literati of the eighteenth century, finding the name *Fingal* upon record, rightly judged that, as the name of a hero, it sounded much better than the simple monosyllable *Fin*; but they furnish the sceptical critic with occasion to object, that the poems which present us with this well-sounding term, have not only utterly departed from Scottish tradition, in delineating the character of *Fin Mac Coul*, but have even forgotten his proper name. They must therefore have been composed, or greatly tampered with, in very recent times.

Upon the whole it may be concluded, that the character of Fingal has gradually improved with the refinement of the age. The hideous and terrific

giant of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, having contracted his stature, and lengthened his name, has become the amiable and accomplished hero of the eighteenth, and the grotesque romances of our great grandfathers have given place to the elegant and interesting poetry of cultivated society.

Sir John Sinclair has produced satisfactory evidence, that in the days of Hector Boethius, Bishop Leslie, Bishop Douglas, and the author of the Interlude of Droichis, Scotch tradition knew nothing of the Fingal or Macpherson's English or Galic Ossian. I have supposed, that the poems, which now pass under that name, owe their origin to the romantic narratives which were popular, in the times of those authors: and notwithstanding the great pains which have been bestowed upon the cultivation of those poems, some lineaments of these, their genuine parents, occasionally appear, as when Fingal moves the rocks, overturns the woods, and diverts the course of the streams, with the impulse of his heels; or when he terrifies the birds of the air, the deer of the mountains, and even the ghosts of night, with the awful sound of his shield.

Our author proceeds, in the next place, to point out certain Valleys, Mountains, Rocks, Rivers, &c. which retain the names of Fingal and his heroes, such as Dun'inn or *Dunien*, *Fingal's Fort* or *Hill*,—*Kem Fein* or *Kemin*, *Fingal's Steps* or *Stairs*, &c. Amongst these examples, I should have expected to find *Elgin*, as I recollect that an ingenious etymo-

logist, extracted from this name, the words *Shealg Fhionn*, which he interpreted, *Fingal's hunting field*. But to the fastidious critic, all such etymologies are as light and airy as the *thistle's beard*, which amused the young heroes of Ossian, in the days of their infancy. If the syllable *in* or *inn*, when it terminates the name of a place, must imply *Fion* or *Fionn*, why may it not be interpreted *Old*, *Small*, *White*, &c. the common appropriations of words, composed of those letters? We have heard, indeed, of one or two caves, which retain the name of *Fionn*, or *Fin Mac Coul*; but it must be recollected, that *Fin* is the hero of the recent *Irish Bards*, and of romantic tradition, not of the classical Ossian. But however these names are to be understood, we cannot admit them as evidence, that *Fin* ever visited the places in which they occur. The renowned Arthur has a *chair* of considerable dimensions in Scotland; he has another in Brecknockshire, three thousand feet high, and more than ten thousand wide: but what man in this enlightened age, supposes that Arthur ever sat in either of these magnificent seats; that he baked his bread in his capacious oven in North Britain; that he played with quoits of thirty or forty tons weight, or, that his cloth has been spread on all his grey tables, throughout the principality of Wales?

I should suppose that the tales and rhapsodies which have prevailed amongst the Scottish Bards, of the last three or four hundred years, would

abundantly account for all the local traditions of the country, as well as for the proverbial expressions commemorative of *Fin* and his heroes. It appears otherwise to the respectable author of this Dissertation:—"This strain of evidence (says he) must "be satisfactory to every impartial reader; and it "is not, therefore, to be wondered at, that Ossian "should be called *the Prince of the Scottish Bards*, "and the *Homer of the ancient Highlanders*." As I would willingly preserve the character of impartiality, I pause to consider over again, what is the train of evidence here produced in favour of Ossian or his poems. Amongst all the writers quoted, there is not a man, prior to the middle of the eighteenth century, who even names the Bard, records one of his titles, points out a single piece, or a line of his composition, or as much as drops a hint whereby it might be guessed that he had known or even heard of such compositions.

The preservation of Ossian's poems has generally been ascribed to oral tradition; but in the fourth section of this chapter, we are reminded of what we had heard before, that some parts of them have been found in manuscript. Sir John Sinclair mentions a manuscript, bearing the dates 1512, and 1529, which contains *two pieces*, but neither of them in this collection. May we presume to ask, what is the size and the general subject of this manuscript? What is the length and the argument of the poems, supposed to be Ossian's? Are they

part of the original contents of the book, or are they written upon waste leaves? Are they in a legitimate Galic orthography, or merely in the random spelling of an English scholar, attempting to write Galic? And finally, why are they not literally copied from the manuscript, into some of the dissertations or notes of these volumes, that they may be compared with the presumptive text of Ossian?

Mr. Macpherson is said to have collected several volumes of manuscripts, in small 8vo. or large 12mo.\* These, if I mistake not, were, for the most part, Mac Vurrich's books. They were committed to writing for the first time, in the eighteenth century, and we have no particular information relative to their subjects. We have not the name of a single poem which they contained. They seem, however, to have been curious. In candid hands, they might have served to elucidate several difficulties, in which the question is at present involved: but what is become of them?

The manuscripts of Mr. Macdonald, of Clanronald, and of Peter Macdonell, are mentioned. They contained something upon the subject of the Fingalians: but these are also lost.

Lord Kaimes commemorates a manuscript of the *first four books of Fingal*, which Mr. Macpherson found in the Isle of Skye, dated as early as the

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\* See Ossian of 1807, v. i. p. 37, v. iii. p. 436, 449, 476, &c.



year 1403. Here we seem to obtain some direct information. May we, however, venture to ask—was this manuscript in prose or verse? Was it in the Irish or the Highland dialect? These are the enquiries of due caution, *upon the present subject*; not of impertinence or unnecessary scruple. The Irish and Scots had romantic tales in prose, upon the subject of Fingal's exploits. The Scots of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries appear to have known that hero principally from such tales. There were manuscripts of Irish poems, scattered about the Highlands and the Isles. Mr. Macpherson, in his Dissertation upon the poems of Ossian, specifies several such pieces, which he had collected. He describes an IRISH manuscript poem, upon the same subject as his own *Fingal*; but he is profoundly silent as to any *Galic* copy of that poem. Had he possessed a genuine copy, of 350 years standing, I think he would have mentioned it.

Another gentleman speaks of a manuscript of *some* of the poems of Ossian, dated 1410. What were the particular contents of this manuscript, and what was its dialect? Where is the man who is able and willing to produce a literal transcript of a single page, from either of these manuscripts?

These questions do not imply the slightest disrespect for either of the several reporters, or the smallest doubt, that some such papers were once in being. It may be admitted, that the Irish, and even the Scots, had some romantic tales, relative

to Fionn and his heroes, as early as the beginning of the fifteenth century; but we want documents to prove, that the identical poems, translated by Mr. Macpherson, did exist at that time, in the same language and phraseology which they now display. The friends of Ossian must be aware of the declarations made by Dr. Johnson, and Dr. Shaw, that, upon inquiry, *all the manuscripts proved to be Irish*. It is known to them, that Mr. Macpherson mentions several Irish, but not one Galic, or Earse manuscript. Hence it may be presumed, that most of the old papers here reported, were in the language of Erin. Their loss, however; is to be regretted. They must have been calculated to throw considerable light upon the subject in debate. What is become of them all? If Macpherson destroyed them, what were his probable motives to do so? I can think but of one.

Sir John Sinclair's great object, in this Dissertation is to prove, that Galic copies of Ossian did exist, prior to Macpherson's time. He therefore lays particular stress upon a collection made by the Rev. John Farquharson, a Roman catholic clergyman, about the year 1745. This was carried by the collector to the Scottish College at Douay, in Flanders, and there left by him when he returned to Scotland, in the year 1773.

As no one in the college, after this gentleman's departure from it, could read the book, it was thrown aside as useless, and the leaves, as long as

they lasted, were torn out to light the fire. 'This is also a subject of regret, as it appears to have been a book of value, which it is now impossible to replace. It is described as a large-paper folio, about three inches thick, and written in a small letter. It should seem, by the collated testimony of several respectable clergymen, that it contained either *the whole*, or *most part*, or a *considerable part* of the poems, published by Macpherson, and that the Galic originals either *equalled* or *surpassed* the merit of the English Ossian. This information was derived from Mr. Farquharson himself, who, during his residence at the college, had been accustomed to compare Macpherson's translation with his own Galic manuscript.

It would be extremely illiberal to suppose, that the gentlemen who gave in this report, conspired together in a premeditated deception. They certainly meant to tell the plain truth; at the same time, it is obvious, that they were not competent to the discovery of the *whole* truth. There was not one of them who could read the book: and when they all saw it daily used as waste paper, there was not a man amongst them, so much interested in its fate, as to rescue from destruction, a single leaf. Their acquaintance with the subject and their attention to it, must have been slight indeed. All they knew amounted to this, that Mr. Farquharson, having Macpherson's English Ossian before him, occasionally turned to his own Galic manuscript,

and pointed out certain passages which he affirmed to be the original of what he was reading ; and this circumstance they reported, upon a recollection of thirty-three years. Notwithstanding, therefore, it might be surmised, upon the first glance at their evidence, that this manuscript contained the whole, or nearly the whole, of Mapherson's poems, in the form in which he published them, it will appear, upon reflection, that this could not have been the real state of the case. For, at the present day, we are not to seek for proofs, that the poems were collected by Macpherson, in detached fragments, from discordant recitals, and mixed with abundance of heterogeneous matter. It required great exertion of judgment and industry, to arrange, reconcile, and purify, such materials. And it is impossible that any two persons, acting independently of each other, should have hit upon the very same mode of executing a task, so difficult and laborious. Hence there must, of necessity, be considerable difference between the adjustment of parts, in the English Ossian, and in the Douay manuscript. I am, therefore, disposed to receive the account of this book, which is given by Mr. John Farquharson, the collector's relation, who had, probably, more accurate knowledge of the subject, than the other gentlemen.

“ I perfectly recollect (says Mr. Farquharson) to  
“ have seen in 1775 and 1776, the manuscript which  
“ you mention : but *being no Gaelic scholar*, all that

“ I can attest is, my having repeatedly heard the  
 “ compiler assert, *it consisted of various Gaelic*  
 “ *songs, a few fragments of modern composition,*  
 “ *but chiefly* EXTRACTS OF OSSIAN’S POEMS, col-  
 “ lected during his long residence in Strathglass,  
 “ previously to the rebellion of 45; and to have  
 “ seen him compare the same with Macpherson’s  
 “ translation, and exclaiming frequently at its  
 “ *inaccuracy.*”

All this is probable: and it is abundantly sufficient to explain the whole mystery of the Douay manuscript.

*Extracts* from the most splendid paragraphs of the popular tales, which related to Fionn and his heroes, were versified at various periods, and were familiarly recited in the Highlands, sixty years ago. Some of these fragments, or *extracts*, were collected by Mr. Farquharson, who, being an admirer of Galic poetry, rendered himself familiar with the contents of his own book. Hence he could readily turn from a brilliant passage in Macpherson’s translation, to some extract of a similar kind, in his Galic collection. The passages thus compared were found either to correspond, and give the critic an impression of their identity, or else to differ so much as to produce an angry exclamation against the translator’s inaccuracy. Hence it may be inferred that, had the Douay manuscript survived the deplorable neglect, or rather the literary treason of these students, it would not have exhibited a corres-

pondence with the text of a single poem, as it appears in the present edition. It would only have proved, what I have always been ready to admit, that detached parts of the same tales, which are here exhibited, did exist in Galic verse, independent of the labours of Mr. Macpherson and his coadjutors. My meaning, with its due restrictions, will be more fully explained in the sequel.

I now proceed to consider Sir John Sinclair's proof—"That the existence of *Swaran* and other " personages, mentioned in the poems of Ossian, " is authenticated by Danish Historians."

To this part of the Dissertation I turned with eager curiosity, and some glimmering of hope, in favour of the Galic Bard. The characters of *Starno*, king of Lochlin, and his son *Swaran*, as well as their military achievements, are utterly unknown to modern historians; but I was here taught to expect the discovery of their names and actions amongst the ancient monuments of Denmark: and I was prepared to admit such a discovery as a circumstantial proof, that the tales, relative to Fingal and his connections, are not wholly destitute of foundation in historical fact. That the reader may be qualified to judge how far these views have been realized, I shall lay before him the entire section, with a few cursory remarks.

"The works of Ossian are certainly to be considered more in the light of the effusions of a

“ poet, than the details of an historian.\* At the  
 “ same time, *if there were any real foundation* for  
 “ the circumstances therein mentioned, there was  
 “ every reason to expect that, however remote the  
 “ period, yet that some traces might doubtless be  
 “ found of those old transactions, in the historians  
 “ of Denmark. With a view of ascertaining that  
 “ point, I applied to the Rev. Mr. Rosing, Pastor  
 “ of the Danish Church, in London, from whom I  
 “ received the following particulars, from a work  
 “ of great authority, namely, *Suhm’s History of*  
 “ *Denmark*.

“ The author gives an account of *Gram*, a Nor-  
 “ wegian prince, who had acquired a territory in  
 “ the western parts of Jutland. He had espoused  
 “ the cause of a princess, daughter of *Sygtrygg*,  
 “ king of East Gotha, who was persecuted by a  
 “ rude suitor, whom she greatly disliked, and who,  
 “ *it would appear*, was the celebrated *Swaran*.  
 “ Gram took upon him her defence, gained her  
 “ favour, but afterwards slew her father, who op-  
 “ posed him.”

Suhm then relates the following particulars:—  
 “ Gram had hardly disengaged himself from this  
 “ contest, before he was obliged to begin another  
 “ with *Swaran*, king of the West Gothes, who  
 “ would revenge the insult and injury he had suf-

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\* But it must be recollected, that Ossian is supposed to relate the history of his own time, and to an audience that could judge of the truth of recent transactions: if, therefore, his works are *genuine*, they must also be regarded as, in a great measure, historically *authentic*.



“fered from Gram, and besides, laid claim to the  
 “East Gothian kingdom, which, however, none of  
 “them, it seems, obtained, as one *Humble* governed  
 “there, not long after. Swaran was the son of  
 “Starno. He had carried on many wars in Ireland,  
 “where he had vanquished most of the heroes that  
 “opposed him, excepting Cuchullin, who, assisted  
 “by the *Gaelic* or *Caledonian* king, *Fingal*, in the  
 “present Scotland, not only defeated him, but  
 “even took him prisoner; but had the generosity  
 “to send him back again to his country: and these  
 “exploits can never be effaced from men’s memory,  
 “as they are celebrated in the most inimitable  
 “manner, by the Scotch poet, *Ossian*; and Swaran  
 “has thereby obtained an honour which has been  
 “denied to many heroes greater than he. With  
 “such an adversary Gram was now to contend.  
 “They met in single combat, and *Swaran* lost his  
 “life: he left sixteen brothers, seven born in wed-  
 “lock, and nine by a concubine. These Gram  
 “was obliged to meet at once, and was fortunate  
 “enough to slay them all.”

“Mr. Rosing observes that the author gives no  
 “date to this event, but in p. 98, he places the  
 “death of *Gram* in the year 240, and from the con-  
 “text of the history, the transactions with *Swaran*  
 “cannot have happened many years before.\*

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\* This Swaran cannot be made to synchronize with Ossian’s king of  
 Lochlin, who invaded Ireland sometime after the expedition of Carausius in  
 the year 287.

“ The existence of Swaran, son of Starno, and  
 “ his wars in Ireland, and his having been defeated  
 “ by *Fingal*, as related by *Ossian*, are therefore  
 “ authenticated by the historians of Denmark ; and  
 “ in their annals, a number of particulars are related  
 “ regarding the manners of the times, which confirm  
 “ many of the particulars mentioned by Ossian. It  
 “ is very satisfactory to have been the means of  
 “ bringing forward a new, and, at the same time,  
 “ so convincing a proof of the authenticity of these  
 “ ancient poems : and hence, indeed, it appears,  
 “ that the more the subject is investigated, the more  
 “ clearly will that authenticity be established.”

Such is this celebrated section, so formidable to  
 the adversaries of Ossian, and closed by the worthy  
 Baronet with so much self-complacency. But let  
 us look about us a little. Where does the Danish  
 historian obtain his authority for the name of  
*Swaran*, the son of Starno ? Only in the *poems of*  
*Ossian* !—I correct myself : we are told, in a note  
 upon the place—“ *Swaran*, no doubt, occurs by the  
 “ name of *Scarín*, in the very old poem *Voluspa*,  
 “ which I believe to be from the sixth or seventh  
 “ century, where a *hill* is denominated after him.”  
 How is this ! The *Voluspa* mentions a *hill* by the  
 name of *Sea-rín*, which to me seems to mean *promontory*,  
 or a *ridge* jutting into the *sea* : this hill  
 must, *undoubtedly*, have been named after some  
 prince : but there was no prince from whom such  
 a name could have been derived, excepting the

*Swaran* of Ossian. Consequently, the occurrence of the word *Searin* as the name of a hill, is a demonstrative proof, that *Swaran* was a real historical character. Very well! But where are we to find the title of this *Searin* or *promontory*, to the kingdom of the West Gothes? This is also pointed out in a note:—"In *Cath-Loda* (a poem of Ossian), "*Swaran* is called *King of the Lakes*, which is *very applicable to West Gotha*."

For the wars which this *Swaran*, *Searin* or *Promontory*, carried on in Ireland, and for his intercourse with the Caledonian Fingal, the poems of Ossian are the historian's sole authority, as it must be evident to every one who attentively reads the passage quoted above. Suhm met with some legendary tale, of a contest between Gram and a nameless adversary. He labours to identify this unknown hero with the *Swaran* of Ossian; and supposing the connection to be duly effected, by the medium of the hill *Searin*, he grounds all his imaginary facts of the achievements of this dubious character, upon the faith of the Bard: and the friends of Ossian, reimport the very same facts, to support the credit of the Caledonian Homer. Is it thus the historians of Denmark furnish *a new and convincing proof of the authenticity of these ancient poems!* It is clear from what has appeared above, that Suhm can step very lightly over tender ground: yet, notwithstanding his dexterity in the management of his *mud pattens*, he has by no means been

successful, in the pursuit of Ossian's subjects. He observes in a note—"Our *North*, in general, is " constantly called *Lochlin* in these poems, which " name is still given to it, in the *Welsh*, *Galic*, and " *Irish* languages. Many particular names of kings " and countries, in *Lochlin*, also occur, of which " none hardly can be explained from our language, as " they are entirely *transformed after the Gaelic*."

Let us then go on to examine whether the *original Galic* of Ossian will afford us any thing of a more satisfactory nature, than what we have hitherto seen.

The patrons of our Bard, from Macpherson downwards, have thrown out several significant hints, relative to the structure of his verse, as affording some peculiar assistance to the memory, and thus facilitating the preservation of his works, from age to age, by oral tradition alone. Thus Sir John Sinclair informs us—"Though the poems were not composed " in *rhyme*, yet there was an emphasis laid upon " particular syllables, of a similar sound, in every " line, which greatly assisted the memory." As I cannot pretend to the possession of a *Galic* ear, I could have wished that some of these gentlemen had analyzed the principles of the several kinds of verse, contained in the poems of Ossian, in order to assist the student in pronouncing the language, and discriminating the harmony of the bardic strain.

Dr. Shaw, in his *Analysis*, only tells us compendiously, and not very distinctly—"The measure of " Ossian's poetry is very irregular and various.

“ Generally he has *couplets* of eight, though they do  
 “ not rhyme, and seven, and sometimes nine syl-  
 “ lables. *These feet* are most commonly trochee  
 “ and dactyle. The trochee occupies the first, the  
 “ dactyle the second and third, and a long syllable  
 “ ends the line.”

This disposition of feet gives a cadence, something to the following effect:—

Morven's hero resembles the song,  
 Vaulting, scampering, scudding along;  
 Bolt, from Selma to Lochlin he goes,  
 Hunting, hampering, taming the foes.  
 Thus the rock from the mountain is torne,  
 Thus the stream through the valley is borne,  
 Thus the ghost in the tempest does cry,  
 Thus, at Midsummer, buzzes the fly.

But although I cannot ascertain the cadence, and the quantity of the syllables, in the several kinds of verse; yet, if the eye may be depended upon, I can safely affirm, that the general body of these poems consists not of *couplets*, but *tetrastichs*, or stanzas of four lines each, and that, in many instances, the verses rhyme alternately, or else, the second and fourth lines of the same stanza rhyme together.

I must give some examples, and I hope the curious reader will not be displeased, to contemplate a few choice specimens of the *original Ossian*, and of the manner in which he is translated, by the scholars of Caledonia: but lest others should be appalled, at the sight of Galic stanzas, it may be proper to apprise them, that I only request their

attention to the mechanical disposition of the letters. Without such a direct glance at the chair of Ossian, we shall never be able to discriminate his real features. The poem called OINAMORUL, opens with these tetrastichs :—\*

## 1.

Margluaiseas solus speur fò scleo,  
Air Larmon mor, a's uaine tom ;  
Mar sinthig sgeul nan triath nach beo  
Air m'anam is an oidhche trom.

## 2.

Nuairthreigeas flidh eaoim a mhuirn  
A chlarsach chiuil san talla ard ;  
Thig guth gu chluais Oisein o chul,  
Mosgladh anma an tur nam bard.

## 3.

'S e guth nam bliadhna thuit a ta ann,  
Tional uile a mall le'n gnìomh.  
Glacam-sa na sgeula nach fann  
Cuiream sìos iad am fonn gun ghiomh.

\* V. i. p. 177. *Thus translated:—*

Ut movetur lux cœlorum sub vapore,  
Super Larmone magnâ, cujus est viridissimus collis,  
Sic venit historia procerum haud vivorum  
Super meum animum nocte gravi.

Quando relinquit poeta blandus suam blanditiam  
Ejus citharâ canorâ in aulâ sublimè,  
Venit vox ad aurem Ossiani a tergo,  
Expergefaciens ejus animam in torpore bardorum.

Est vox annorum quæ ceciderunt, quæ adest,  
Colligens omnia huc cum eorum factis.  
Captem ego historias haud fuitiles,  
Mittam deorsum eas in cansionem sine fraude.

## 4.

Cha shruth tha dorcha fonn an rìgh,  
 'Nuair dh'eirease measg strì nan teud;  
 O laimh-ghil an Lutha nam frìth,  
 Malmhina, cruth clìth gun bheud.

## 5.

A Lutha nan tend a's glaine fuaim!  
 Gun samhchair air do chruachan ard,  
 Nuair shiubblas geal-lamh na stuaim  
 Air chlaisraich fo dhuan nam bard.

## 6.

Sholuis nan smuainte dorcha truagh,  
 Tha tarruing suas air m'anam dall;  
 A nighean Thoscair nan ceann-bheart cruaidh,  
 Thoir cluas do chaoin fhuaim tha mall!

When the reader has just cast his eye over these twenty-four first lines of *Oinamorul*, I think he must readily acknowledge, that they resolve themselves into six *tetrastichs*, the lines of which, for the most part, rhyme alternately, or else, the second and fourth rhyme together. Such *tetrastichs*, or rhyming stanzas, of four lines each, are frequent in all the shorter poems; nor are they wanting in

Non flumen, quod est obscurum, melos regis,  
 Quando surgit e mediâ contentione chordarum  
 Ab manu candidâ in Luthâ saltuum,  
 Malvinâ, formâ concinnâ sine defectu!

Lutha chordarum quarum est purissimus sonus!  
 Sine silentio super tuis præcipitus altis,  
 Quando pergit candida manus modestiæ  
 Super citharam sub carmine bardorum.

O lux cogitationum obscurarum, miserarum,  
 Quæ se-trahunt sursum super meum animum cæcum,  
 O filia Toscaris galearum durarum,  
 Adhibe aurem blando sono qui est lentus!



Fingal and Temora. I have marked nearly two hundred such stanzas, in the former of those poems, and about half that number in the latter. Rhyming tetrastichs were, therefore, familiarly known to the author or authors of all these poems.

To a mere English scholar, the rhyme between the first and third line, in the *second* and *sixth* stanza, appears to be defective; but, according to the prosody of the *Irish grammarians*, it is legitimate and perfect. These literati, as I remarked in a former part of this Essay, have arranged the letters of the alphabet in fanciful and artificial classes: and they deem it sufficient, for the purpose of rhyme or correspondence, that a letter should be answered by one of its own class, agreeably to the following distribution:—

The vowels *a, o, u*, are *broad*—*e* and *i*, *small*. Diphthongs and triphthongs generally follow the class of their first vowel. Of the consonants, *c, p, t*, are *soft*—*b, d, g*, *hard*—*ch, fh, ph, sh, th*, *rough*—*m, ll, nn, rr, ng*, *robust*—*bh, dh, gh, mh, l, n, r*, *light*—*f, weak*, sometimes *rough*—*s, barren*—*h, hollow*.

Now if, by this scale, we compare the word *mhuirn*, which ends the first line in the second stanza, with *chul*, which terminates the third line, we shall find that *ui* in the former word, is a *broad* diphthong, and *u*, in the latter, a *broad* vowel—*rn*, in the former, and *l*, in the latter term, are *light*

consonants : the rhyme,\* therefore, between *mhuirn* and *chul*, in spite of the *eye* and the *ear* of the Gothic scholar, is legitimate and perfect. So again, in the sixth stanza, *truagh* and *cruaidh* make a perfect rhyme, because *gh* and *dh* pertain to the same class of *light* consonants.

This feature, in the versification of Ossian, presenting itself so readily, induces me to look more narrowly into the stanzas cited above. Amongst the ornaments of *Irish* tetrastichs, we generally find a *concord* or *agreement*, between the last word of the first line, and some word in the body of the second ; as also between the end of the third line, and some word in the fourth. The same peculiarity appears in the stanzas before us.

Thus, stanza 2, *mhuirn*, in the first line, and *chiuil* in the second, make a concord, because *r*, *n*, and *l*, pertain to the same class. So also *tur*, in the fourth line, answers to *chul* in the third, *r* and *l* being of the same class. In stanza 3, we have the like concords between *ann* and *mall*, and again, between *fann* and *fonn* ; *nn* and *ll* being accounted *robust* consonants, and *a* and *o* *broad* vowels. In the fourth stanza, *stri* accords with *righ*, and *clith* with *frith*, only instead of *righ* we ought to read *ri*,

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\* That I may not puzzle my reader nor myself with the uncouth terms of Irish grammar, I shall call the correspondence of *final* syllables *rhyme* ; and the correspondence of a *final* syllable in one line, with another syllable in the middle of the next, *concord* or *agreement*. Let it also be noted, that I do not attempt to analyze these stanzas, any farther than what relates to such *correspondences*.

an orthography authorized by the Irish Bards, and even admitted in the poems of Ossian. Thus the repeated alterations and improvements of the orthography of our poet, have occasionally displaced the rules of prosody. But the same rules appear again, stanza 6, in the concords between *truagh* and *suas*, and between *cruaidh* and *chaoin*; *s* being a *barren* consonant, admits of any associate that may present itself—*uai* and *aoi* are *broad* triphthongs, and *dh* and *n* pertain to the class of *light* consonants. Hence it is evident, that the composer of these verses was not only acquainted with rhyming tetrastichs, but also, with that identical system of arbitrary classification, to which the Irish grammarians subjected the letters of the alphabet. How, otherwise, was it possible for him to have discovered, that such words as *mhuirn* and *chul*—*chul* and *tur*—*ann* and *mall*, made perfect concords or *rhymes*?

In this part of my Essay, the cursory reader may not find much entertainment; but I must bespeak his patience and attention for a few pages. He has here presented to him, the very thing he has often called for—not hypothetical reasoning relative to the poems of Ossian, but *plain matter of fact*. It must be a subject of no small curiosity, to contemplate this renowned Caledonian prince, of the *third* century, close at his studies, with the *Irish* grammars of the *seventeenth* century, laid open before him. The Scots have surely been very

moderate in their charge against the Irish: they only accuse them of having stolen the *poems* of Ossian, whilst it should seem, that they laid their rapacious hands upon his grammar also! In order to render the fact incontrovertible, that this grammar was known to the Bard, who composed the present poems, I shall consider a few tetrastichs, in which the rhyme is less obvious to the general reader. In the first Duan of *Cath-Loda*, v. 109, is the following:—\*

A Thorcuil-torno nan ciabh glas,  
Am bheil astar do chas mu Lula.  
Do ghath teine mar eibhle dol as  
Aig sruth a tha cas fo dhubhra.

Here the concords between *glas* and *chas*—*as* and *cas*, are sufficiently obvious; but *l*, *dh*, *bh*, and *r*, all belong to the class of *light* consonants, it therefore follows that, according to the laws of Irish prosody, *Lula* and *dhubhra* constitute a perfect double rhyme.

The two first stanzas in *Carricthura*:—†

An d'fhag thu gorm-astar nan speur  
A mbic gun bheud, a's or-bhui ciabh  
Tha dorsa na h-oiche dhuit fein  
Agus pailliu do chlos 'san iar.

\* V. i. p. 11. *Translation*:---

O Torcultorno cirrorum glaucorum,  
An est iter tuorum pedum circa Lulam,  
Tuo radio ignis instar prunæ se-extinguentis,  
Ad fluentum quod est præceps sub umbra?

† V. i. p. 97. *Translation*:---

An reliquisti tu cæruleum iter cælorum,  
O fili sine defectu, ejus est aurato-flavus cirrus?  
Sunt portæ noctis tibi ipsi,  
Et tentorium tuæ requietis in occidente.

Thig na stuaidh mu'n cuairt gu mall  
 A choimhead fir a's glaine ghruaidh;  
 A' togail fo eagal an ceann  
 Ri d' fhaicinn cho aillidh 'na d' shuain.

In the first of these stanzas, the termination *speur* rhymes with the termination *fein*, *eu* and *ei* being *small* diphthongs, and *r* and *n* *light* consonants—*ciabh* and *iar* rhyme, for the same reasons. *Mall*, in the second stanza, rhymes imperfectly with *ceann*, *a* being a broad vowel, and *ea* a small diphthong: this, however, has the licence of Irish prosody: *ll* and *nn* in these words pertain to the class of *robust* consonants. *Gruaidh* rhymes with *shuain*, *dh* and *n* being *light* consonants; and *ceann* forms a concord with the syllable *cinn* in *fhaicinn*. The system upon which these stanzas are constructed is thus ascertained, beyond the possibility of dispute.

The same poem, v. 23:—\*

Bha mhaile ghorm mu cheann an t-sonn,  
 Mar nial nach trom air aghaidh grein,  
 Nuair ghluaiseas e'na cideadh donn,  
 A' feuchainn leth a shoills 'san speur.

A stanza in which the principles of Irish prosody are more strictly observed, never came from the pen of a Bard. *Sonn*, in the first line, rhymes with

Veniunt fluctus circumcirca tardè,  
 Visum virum, cujus est purissima gena,  
 Tollentes sub metu suum caput,  
 Inter te cernendum adeo formosum in tuo sopore.

\* V. i. p. 99. Translation:—

Est galea cærulea circa caput herois,  
 Sicut nubes haud gravida super vultu solis,  
 Quando movet-se ille in veste subfusca,  
 Ostendens dimidium suæ lucis in cælo.

*donn*, in the third : it also accords with *trom*, in the middle of the second, *nn* and *m* being *robust* consonants. *Grein* in the second line, rhymes with *speur* in the fourth, *ei* and *eu* being *small* diphthongs, and *n* and *r* *light* consonants. *Donn*, in the third, accords with *shoill* in the fourth, *o* being a *broad* vowel, and *oi* a *broad* diphthong—*nn* and *ll* taking their place amongst the *robust* consonants.

Examples of this kind might be adduced, from every part of these poems ; but, in dealing out Galic stanzas, I must have some regard to my reader's appetite. Let me then relieve him, for the present, by asking a question in plain English.—By what means could Ossian have discovered, that such syllables as *chul* and *tur—ann* and *mall—threin* and *deigh—speur* and *fein—grein* and *speur—donn* and *shoill*, and the like, constituted legitimate rhymes ? His untutored ear could never have informed him of this circumstance, unless it be said, that the whole system is founded in obvious principles of nature. But to me at least, it appears so fanciful and arbitrary, that I should deem it impossible for two societies of men, without mutual communication, to have adjusted it alike, in all its parts. If therefore, the Scots insist upon the genuineness, and antiquity of these poems, it remains for them to prove, or at least, to assume, that the system of prosody, taught by the Irish grammarians, of the seventeenth century, was derived from the school of Ossian. But upon that hypothesis, it must follow,

that Ossian was intimately acquainted with letters. He must have examined them with the penetration of a conjurer, in order to ascertain which was *soft*, which was *hard*, which was *rough*, which was *light*, &c. especially, when it became requisite for him to adjust the several classes of the *quiescent* consonants and combinations. He must have often paused over the harp of Selma, to award the several claims of the *broad aphthongs*, *ophthongs* or *uphthongs*, and the *small ephthongs* and *iphthongs*. He must have also known, and duly attended to, *the whole orthographical scheme of the present Irish language*: for a slight deviation from that orthography, would throw the whole fabrick of his verse into confusion and utter ruin, as might be proved from several passages, in the present edition of his poems. But if these various branches of knowledge did not appertain to the age and country of Ossian, the Galic scholars, however reluctantly, must admit, that the Caledonian Bard has employed a secretary of more recent times, and of the school of Erin.—No possible doubt can remain upon this subject.

Although the general principles of Irish prosody pervade the tetrastichs of Ossian, it is acknowledged, that there are several paragraphs which, at present, exhibit but a partial attention to the minuter rules of this prosody. Such deviations may be owing to various causes, amongst which we may reckon the repeated alterations of the ortho-



graphy. It is well known that Macpherson was very desirous of devising some new scheme of orthography for these poems, and that, for some years, he was resolutely bent upon publishing them, under the disguise of *Greek* letters. He was probably aware, that the only established orthography of the language, namely, the Irish, would betray the true principles of the versification; and apprehensive of the critical decision that must follow. With these feelings, it must have been his wish to obliterate the Irish mark, whenever it appeared too conspicuous. The editors of this work have restored the genuine orthography, to a certain degree. Truth and literary integrity demanded of them something more than what they have done; but they have done abundantly too much for the cause of the Caledonian Ossian.

Another cause of the present irregularity of the verse is the change or transposition of several words or lines, by illiterate reciters, or superficial critics, without regard to the laws of the metre. Great allowance must also be made for the mutilation of several stanzas by Mr. Macpherson, who was anxious to suppress every thing that might derogate from the majesty of Ossian; and likewise for the connective paragraphs, which he found it necessary to introduce, from the traditional tales, or from the resources of his own genius. I subjoin a few examples of stanzas, in which I conceive the metre to be injured, from some of these causes.

*Cath-Loda, Duan i. v. 132 :—\**

Bha Torcul-torno, labhair an oigh,  
 Aig Lula nan sruth mor a' tamh ;  
 Bha thuinneas aig Lula nan seod—  
 Tha 'n t-slige corr an diugh na laimh.

The word *seod* in the third line, throws this stanza into confusion: it will neither answer as a rhyme to *oigh*, in the first, nor accord with any word in the fourth, as it ought to do: it must therefore be regarded as corrupt. It is here translated *heroun*; but the only meaning of *seod* which I find in Llwyd's Dictionary, is a *jewel*, or a *seal*. The word intended by the Bard is *seadh*, an antiquated term, implying *strong* or *brave*. This would restore the whole stanza. *Oigh*, in the first, rhymes with *seadh* in the third, and forms a concord with *mor* in the second: *tamh*, in the second, rhymes with *laimh*, in the fourth; and *seadh* makes a perfect concord with *daigh*.

I am pretty confident this correction is right, as I observe the same word, *seod*, occasions the like confusion in other places. Thus, Carriethura, v. 39, the four lines of a stanza end with *fonn—sheol—tonn—seod*. The last word cannot rhyme with *sheol*, because *d* and *l* pertain to different classes; but restore *seadh*, and the rhyme and sense will be

\* V. i. p. 13. Translation :—

Erat Torcultorno, locuta est virgo,  
 Ad Lulam fluminum magnorum quiescens;  
 Erat ejus habitatio ad Lulam heroun;  
 Est concha eximia hodie in ejus manu.

correct. Again; *Carthon*, v. 7, *seod* is confronted with *torr*, which is incorrect—instead of *seod*, read its synonym *sonn*, and the alliteration is restored.

*Cath-Loda*, Duan iii. v. 18, has this tetrastich:—\*

Le d' thri guthaibh thig gun stad,  
Soillsicheadh gu grad na dh'fhalbh;  
Tog sambla nan laoch, nach robhlag,  
Air chiar am, a chaidh fada thall.

Here *stad* accords with *grad*, and rhymes with *lag*, *d* and *g* being *hard*—*lag* accords with *fad-a*; but *thall* will not rhyme with *fhalbh*, *ll* being *robust*, and *l* and *bh* *light*. I find, however, that instead of *thall* we have authority for *thal*, with a single *l*, and that is the orthography which this stanza requires, to render it perfect.

*The next stanza*:—†

A Thoirne nan stoirm 's nan cruach,  
Chi mi shuas mo dhream ri d' thaobh;  
Fionnghal ag aomadh fo ghruaim  
Thar uaigh Mhic Roinne nach b'fhaoin.

This has, evidently, been altered, without due attention to the metre. *Cruach* will neither accord with *dhream*, nor rhyme with *ghruaim*, *ch* being

\* V. i. p. 53. *Translation*:

Cum tuis ternis vocibus veni sine (morâ) stando,  
Illuminans ocyus eos qui abierunt;  
Tolle simulacrum bellatorum, qui non fuerunt ignavi,  
Super fuscum tempus, quod ivit longè ultra.

† *Translation*:---

O Thorna procellarum et præcipitiorum,  
Cerno ego supra meum agmen ad tuum latas;  
Fingalem se-inclinantem sub tetricitate,  
Super sepulchrum filii Ronæ, qui non fuit languidus.

*rough* and *m robust*—transpose *cruach* and *stoirm*, in the first line, and the rhyme is complete throughout. Still, however, *dhream* will not accord with *stoirm*, *ea* being *small* and *oi broad*. Instead of *dhream* read *dhraim*, and the stanza will be as perfect as any verse in Virgil.

Carricthura, v. 35 :—\*

'S taitneach leam aoibhneas a bhroin,  
Mar dhruichd mothar earraich chaoin  
Fo 'n lub geug dharaig nan torr,  
'S an duilleach og ag eirigh maoth.

An Irish grammarian could not prove this tetras-tich, as it now stands; but transpose *earraich* and *chaoin* in the second line, and instead of *torr* read *tor*, with a single *r*, as we are warranted to do, and the verse will be complete in all its parts. *Bhroin* will accord with *chaoin*, and rhyme with *tor*: *earraich* will rhyme with *maoth*, *ch* and *th* being *rough*, and *tor* will accord with *og* in the fourth line.

*The same poem*, v. 77 :—†

Fada Bhinnubheil, fada thall,  
Tha m'astar gu blar le Fionnughal.  
Cha 'n 'eil mo choin fein ri m'thaobh,  
No mo cheum air fraoch nan gleaun.

\* V. i. p. 99. *Translation* :—

Est jucundum mihi gaudium luctûs,  
Sicut ros moderatus veris blandi,  
Sub quo flectitur ramus quercûs tumulorum,  
Foliis novis surgentibus tenerè.

† *Translation* :—

Procul, Vinela, procul ex adverso,  
Est meum iter ad prœlium cum Fingale.  
Non sunt mei canes ipsius juxta meum latus,  
Nec meus gradus super ericâ vallium.

Here are several obvious corruptions. Instead of *thall* we should read *thal*: instead of *fraoch*, heath, *raon*, a plain or heath—an *Ossianic* word. My principal inducement, however, to notice this tetrastich, is the occurrence of the name *Fionnghal*, which the Scots claim for themselves, whilst they acknowledge that *Fionn* is the hero's Irish name. But were *Fionn* *Coptic* or *Chinese*, this stanza demands it, to rhyme with *gleann*. *Fionnghal* must have been substituted by some person, either strongly impelled by a patriotic motive, or else absolutely ignorant of the laws of the metre. With the proposed corrections, *thal* accords with *blar* and rhymes with *thaobh*—*Fionn* rhymes with *gleann*, and *thaobh* accords with *raon*, as the reader may clearly perceive, by casting his eye over the *classes* of the Irish letters. Such examples may be abundantly multiplied, but I only beg leave to add one more, from *the same poem*, v. 96:—\*

Ma thuiteas mi sa' m'bhagh, a Bhinnbheil,  
Togsa dileas gu h-ard m' uaigh,  
Clacha glas, as meall do 'n uir,  
'N an comhara do d' run, a Bhinnbheil.

Here the form of the tetrastich cannot be immediately recognized; but if we transpose the two

\* *Translation* :---

Si cadam ego in acie, O Vinvela,  
Tolle tu amicè, in altum, meum sepulchrum,  
Saxa glauca, et molem telluris,  
Ut signa tui amoris, Vinvela.

last lines, and instead of *meall* write *meal*, the rhymes and concords will be perfect.

Many of the properties of these stanzas may have escaped my notice, as my knowledge of the language is imperfect. I have, however, ascertained one important fact—that the author of these poems certainly understood, and scrupulously attended to, the system of orthography now established in the Irish language, as well as the artificial arrangement to which the letters of that language have been subjected. By thus lightly meddling with the strains of the immortal Ossian, I may, perhaps, incur the momentary indignation of Galic scholars. But men of learning and candour will reflect as well as feel. I may, therefore, in time, look for an acknowledgment, that, in these minute remarks, I have produced stronger proof than any which has hitherto been offered to the public, that many of these identical stanzas, had passed through more hands than one, before they were delivered to the editors of the present work. For Macpherson does not appear to have studied the prosody of Erin; and I must again repeat it, as the fact is strong and decisive, the preceding examples, to which several hundreds, equally conclusive, might be added, have proved, that the author of these verses was intimately acquainted with the singular and arbitrary classification of letters, laid down by the Irish grammarians of the seventeenth century, and originally devised by the Irish Bards of the fourteenth and fifteenth.

This evidence of his peculiar learning, may detract something from the *supposed Ossian's* claim to remote antiquity; but it does him credit in another way; it fully demonstrates, that he was no *illiterate barbarian*.

As it is by no means clear, that all these poems, or all the parts of any one of them, are the work of the same man, there may be many of the tetrastichs, in which the principles of Irish prosody were not accurately observed, by the original composer: but those passages in which we may trace the same tetrastich form, and a certain degree of attention to these rules, make up, at least, two thirds of the body of the collection, and are to be found in every one of the poems. Amongst these are interspersed, at irregular intervals, *one, two, or three*, rhyming couplets, such as we find in the Galic translation of *Pope's Messiah*: at other times, we may remark from one to ten or a dozen arbitrary lines, which, I believe, defy all the known laws of prosody, and can be regarded as nothing more than a kind of *measured prose*, like Macpherson's English Ossian. I offer an example of rhyming couplets, from *Cath-Loda, Duan i. v. 11.\**

Mi coimhead air Lochlin nan sonn,  
Ciar uisge Uthorno nan tonn;

\* V. i. p. 3. *Translation* :---

Me intuentem Lochlinum bellatorum,  
Fuscam aquam Uthornæ, undarum;



O'n iar-chuain a tearnadh mo rìgh ;  
 'S muir bheucach fo ghaoith a' strì ;  
 'S neo-lionar glan oigridh nam beann  
 Tìr choigrich a' togail fo 'n ceann.

It may be conjectured that such couplets as these, together with the lawless lines which, in almost every page, intrude upon our notice, contain the matter which Macpherson borrowed from the *tales*, or prose romances, in order to connect his poetic fragments, and mould them into regular compositions.

As to the assistance which the memory may have derived from the structure of Ossian's verse, it may have been considerable, in the *rhyming* tetrastichs. Those which are wholly formed upon the Irish *classes*, could have presented but few facilities, excepting to persons who had accurately studied the fanciful system, upon which they are constructed. And the abrupt intrusion of couplets and arbitrary lines, at irregular intervals, and in uncertain numbers, must have had a direct tendency to confound the strongest memory. But I am greatly deceived, if the memory was long exercised by any of these stanzas, in the form which they now exhibit. I have shewn above, that these poems, generally speaking, are composed according to certain rules of Irish prosody: I would therefore recommend it to the grammarians

Ab occidentali oceano descendente meum regem ;  
 Et mare mugiens sub vento certans ;  
 Est haud numerosa pura juventus montium  
 Terram peregrinorum tollens sub ejus caput.

of Erin, to try whether many of those tetrastichs which are now defective, may not be restored to their integrity, by merely declining the nouns and verbs after the Irish manner, and rectifying the orthography. Should this experiment succeed, it will furnish an absolute demonstration, that the poet not only imitated the Bards, but even employed the language of the Western Island. My knowledge of that language is not sufficient to enable me to pursue the enquiry: yet I can perceive a considerable number of minute characteristics, which strongly excite a suspicion of the fact I have suggested. I submit the following examples.

*Carthon*, v. 84 :—\*

‘S dubh-dorcha do smaointe, ard laoi<sup>ch</sup>,  
A’ d’ aonar mu Lora nam faim :  
Chuinnear mu d’ og-bhron nach faoin,  
Air a cheo a chuir d’ aois fo ghruaim.

Here *laoich* will not rhyme with *faoin*, because *ch* is *rough*, and *n*, *light*; but an Irish scholar would have written this vocative case, *laoigh*, and then the rhyme would be perfect: for *gh* and *n* pertain to the same class. Again *Lora* will not accord with *laoich*, nor yet with *laoigh*; but the Irish Bards write this name *Laoghaire* (see Miss Brooke’s *Magnus*) and *laogh*, or *air* would accord with *laoigh*; *gh* and *r* being of the same class.

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\* V. i. p. 153. *Translation*:—

Sunt atro-fuscae tuæ cogitationes, O ardue bellator,  
In tuâ solitudine circa Loram sonituum :  
(Audiamus) audiatur de tuo juvenili-dolore hand vano,  
De vapore qui misit tuam senectutem sub tetricitatem.

In the poem of *Oinamorul*, v 126, we have a stanza rendered equally defective, for want of varying the termination *ch*, after the Irish manner :

Co as an triath, is e thuairt an oigh  
Tha coimhead air gorm-cheo a chuain?  
Co th' annach triath a chuil mhoir  
Dubh mar sgeith fhithich nan cruach?\*

*Fhithich* in the fourth line, will not accord with *mhoir* in the third, nor will *cruach* rhyme with *chuain* in the second : but a raven, in Irish, is *fiach*, in the genitive case *fiaigh*, and *cruach* makes *cruaigh* in the genitive—these corrections restore the alliteration.

Fingal, b. i. v. 9:—

Eirich, a Chuchullin, eirich !  
Rise, Cuchullin, rise !

Here *eirich* will not accord with *threun* in the next line, nor rhyme with *feile* in the third : but the true imperative is *eirigh*, of which we have an example in Llwyd's Dictionary ; and *gh* agrees with *n* and *l*.

Upon the whole, then, it appears that this edition was prepared for the press, without due attention to the laws of the metre. I may add, that the tetrastich form is kept pretty much out of sight, by the punctuation and the manner in which the poems

\* V. i. p. 185. Translation :—

Unde est princeps, est quod dixit virgo,  
Qui est aspiciens super cœrulam nebulam oceani?  
Quis est nisi princeps cæsariei magnæ  
Nigræ instar alæ corvi præcipitorum?

are printed. It follows, that the Galic scholars have hitherto made no great proficiency in the NEW study of their native language: and if they make these poems their standard, which they seem disposed to do, their progress must be effectually impeded. A language which, for many centuries, has been abandoned to the caprice of the vulgar, without grammar, without books, without a vocabulary, without orthography, is not to be restored to its ancient purity, without due attention to the sister dialects, which have been preserved and cultivated with greater care.

An unnecessary multiplication of examples would be irksome to the English reader: let those which I have now given suffice to explain my meaning, and to ground an opinion, that the nearer we approach to laws of the Irish grammar—to its orthography—its etymology—its syntax—and its prosody, the better we shall be able to explain the principles of versification in certain parts of these poems. The ensuing section will disclose substantial reasons, why this observation should not be extended to *every part of them*.

From what has been here remarked, I would not infer that the poems were composed in Ireland, or by natives of that country. My remark only verifies the testimony of Dr. Shaw, that, even in the Highlands, *the Irish was always the written, and the studied language*. However this may have been, these poems are not the work of an illiterate

Bard : nor could they possibly have been composed in any age, prior to the arrangement of that singular scheme of prosody—that fanciful classification of the letters, which is explained by the Irish grammarians of the seventeenth century.

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## SECTION VI.

### SECOND ADDITIONAL.

*On the Galic text of the poems ascribed to OSSIAN.*



Galic scholars pronounce the original language of these poems to be inimitable in modern times, and hence infer the antiquity and integrity of the text.---This argument set aside, by shewing—that the text was altered by Macpherson, previous to his translation---that it has also been altered subsequent to the publication of the English Ossian.---Macpherson detected in composing an *original* of Berrathon.---Recomposition of the Galic poems exemplified in Calthion and Colmal---Malvina's Dream---Address to Oscar---and the Story of Oscar's Death---the language of these poems, therefore, *imitable* and *imitated*, in the present age.---Galic scholars incompetent to judge of the antiquity of the language---proved by their quoting an acknowledged production of the eighteenth century as the genuine work of Ossian.

The author having weighed these circumstances and facts---denies the antiquity and historical authenticity of all these compositions---expects his literary doom from the Scotch critics---makes his humble confession---and retires---leaving the Caledonians in full possession of all the fame arising from the production of these poems, considered as works of modern invention.

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I have reason to apprehend that the conclusion which I have drawn, from a view of Ossian's metre, will not prove agreeable to the defenders of the Caledonian Bard, who appear to assume as a fact, that the Galic text, as it is now published, not only came in a perfect state, into Mr. Macpherson's hands, but had existed in its full integrity, from a remote age. Let us hear the sentiments of Sir John Sinclair, upon this subject.

“ It is ingeniously observed, in the Report of the Highland Society, (p. 137), That the publication of the original Galic will afford an opportunity, to those who question its authenticity, to examine narrowly the intrinsic evidence, arising from the nature and construction of the language. This is a point of the first importance in the dispute: for not an instance can be collected, of a fabrication in a foreign language, or in a language supposed to be that of an ancient period, where, upon an accurate examination, internal proofs of the forgery have not been discovered, in the very language alone, in which the forgery was attempted to be conveyed.”



To this confident challenge, our author subjoins the following particulars:—" It is decidedly the " opinion of such Gaelic scholars as have hitherto " had an opportunity of examining *the whole, or* " *any part of the original*, that the language in " which Ossian's poems are written, is *of great* " *antiquity, and could not be imitated in modern* " *times*. They assert that it would be as difficult " for any modern scholar, to pass his compositions " in Greek and Latin, for those of Homer or Virgil, " as it would be for Macpherson to have composed " Gaelic poems, which could not, at once, be distinguished from those of so ancient a date.\* It " is hardly possible, for those who are not conversant in the Gaelic language, to judge of the " validity of this argument; but the unanimous, or " even the general testimony, of respectable and " intelligent Gaelic scholars, to that fact, must " necessarily have great weight in such a controversy.

" There is another mode, however, by which the " publication of the Gaelic will furnish the most " satisfactory evidence of its own originality; " namely, by comparing it, or a new literal translation of it, with Macpherson's translation, in " order to ascertain the following particulars:—

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\* Not quite so difficult: for we know what the Greek and Latin languages were, in the time of Homer and Virgil; but we have no undoubted standard of the ancient Gaelic, to confront with a modern forgery.

“ 1. Whether Macpherson did not, in many in-  
 “ stances, misconceive the meaning of the original,  
 “ and consequently, give an erroneous translation?  
 “ 2. Whether he did not frequently add many words  
 “ and expressions, not to be found in the original,  
 “ which additions have been adduced as plagiarisms  
 “ from other authors; and consequently, as argu-  
 “ ments against the authenticity of the poems?  
 “ 3. Whether he did not leave out many beautiful  
 “ words and passages, to be found in the original?  
 “ 4. Whether he did not pass over many words and  
 “ phrases, which he found it difficult to translate?  
 “ and 5. Whether, on the whole, he did sufficient  
 “ justice to the nervous simplicity and genuine  
 “ beauties of the Celtic Bard?—All these circum-  
 “ stances will appear, beyond question, by a fair  
 “ comparison between Macpherson’s and a new  
 “ translation.”

I have quoted this argumentative passage without  
 abridgment, in order to shew the opinion of these  
 respectable critics—That the Galic copy now pre-  
 sented to the public, is *ancient* and *authentic*—that  
 it is the same which Macpherson had before him,  
 when he translated the poems into English—and  
 consequently, that every deviation of the English  
 version, from the present Galic text, is to be im-  
 puted to the infidelity or incapacity of the translator.

It is upon these grounds that Sir John Sinclair  
 proceeds against Mr. Macpherson, as if he had

been translating the works of Homer, Virgil, or any other classical author, whose text was already fixed, publickly known, and undisputed. He, accordingly, exhibits a new translation of the first book of Fingal, by the *Rev. Mr. Ross*. This is contrasted, line by line, with Macpherson's translation: and the contrast is followed up by twenty close pages of learned notes, in which it is proved, that the former translator added some lines, omitted others, and made fanciful allusions to passages of Scripture, to Pope's Homer, Thomson's Seasons, &c. without authority from the venerable Ossian: also, that he misconceived the meaning of numerous passages, and always to the disadvantage of the original. In all this I cannot help thinking, that the worthy Baronet and his new translator have dealt rather hardly with poor Macpherson, for whom I must be allowed to retain some degree of respect and gratitude. To him, more than to any other individual, we are indebted for the *Galic*, as well as for the *English* Ossian. We learn from Macpherson's own notes, from Dr. Smith, and from the general stream of evidence, that the reputed works of this Bard were collected in a multitude of disjointed fragments, discordant amongst themselves, and mixed with abundance of heterogeneous matter. Great must have been the labour and industry demanded of him, who undertook to arrange, connect, digest, and prune such originals as

these.\* It may be fairly supposed that Macpherson, at the time when he executed the task of translating, has only brought his materials to a proper bearing amongst themselves. He may not, at that period, have taken a fair copy of them, or given them their last polish. He may not have intended to bestow any further labour upon them. But when his adversaries, and his friends, both which parties included all the literati of the British Islands, began to call aloud for his originals, he bethought himself of revising his Galic papers, and giving them that finish which might, in time, render them fit to meet the public eye. This was a tedious and embarrassing task. Its accomplishment was promised, and the promise was often repeated: but still, something remained to be done. At last, after a delay of six and forty years, and after the death of the collector, *part* of the originals make their appearance. And it must be acknowledged that, either Macpherson himself, or some of his coadjutors, had a tolerable knowledge of the language and the subject, ortherwise the respectable copy now exhibited could never have assumed its present form. If this reasoning be just, we need not charge Macpherson with ignorance, or want of taste, in order to account for the difference

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\* That the Galic text does not stand at present as it came into Mr. Macpherson's hands, is evident upon the slightest inspection: for we here miss all those passages which this writer avowedly retrenched in his translation, as supposed interpolations of the modern Bards.

between the English and the Galic text. The latter may be, at present, superior to the old translation : but that superiority it owes to the translator's industry and zeal.

Not to enter the lists of hypothetical argument with the Caledonian critics, I shall bring the *ancient*, *authentic*, and *inimitable* language of Ossian, to the test of a *few plain facts* which happen to fall within the compass of my own observation.

That much remained to be done in completing the originals of this Bard, long after the translation had been published, is a fact that just shews itself, in the course of Sir John Sinclair's Dissertation. We are there informed that the late Mr. John Mackenzie was accustomed to keep a regular diary of any important occurrence, and on the 22d of July,\* there is the following entry in that diary:—  
“ Went at one o'clock to Putney Common, to Mr. Macpherson ; he said he had been searching in  
“ an old trunk up stairs, which he had with him in  
“ East Florida, for the original of Berrathon. That  
“ he feared it was in an *imperfect condition*, and  
“ that part of it was wanting, as of Carthon : that  
“ *he had only put together a few lines of it*, AND  
“ THOSE NOT TO HIS OWN LIKING : *that he had*  
“ *tired of it, after a short sitting.*”

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\* The date of the year is not added ; but as it was after Mr. Macpherson's return from East Florida, it must have been many years posterior to the publication of the English Ossian.

This *perplexity* of choice, this extraordinary *fatigue* of the animal spirits, must, surely, have implied something more than the mere labour of transcribing two or three hundred short lines, and making a few orthographical corrections. It is evident from the language of this paragraph, that something more is implied. Macpherson possessed part of the original, in an imperfect state, whilst another part was entirely wanting. He had, with great labour and fatigue, been putting together a few lines, and those not to his own liking—that is, he had been recomposing those imperfect passages which he possessed, or endeavouring to supply those which he had not. He had proceeded slowly and laboriously in this arduous task, and having at length, put together a few lines, he read them over with anxious care, and still found them unworthy of Ossian. Here then is an important fact:—the *original* Galic of this Bard remained to be *composed* or PUT TOGETHER, several years after the *translation* had circulated through Europe: and Macpherson was forced to make toilsome and repeated efforts, before he could *compose, or put together a few lines of it, to his own liking.*

I might here point out several strong circumstances to prove that the Galic text has certainly been altered subsequent to Macpherson's translation, and that the editors of the present work ought to have been fully aware of this fact. I shall lay one of these circumstances before the reader.

In the argument prefixed to *Calthon and Colmal*, Macpherson tells us—"The story of the poem is "handed down by tradition, thus: in the country "of the Britons, between the walls, two chiefs lived "in the days of Fingal, Dunthalgo Lord of *Teutha*, "*supposed to be the Tweed*; and Rathmor, who "dwelt at Clutha, well known to be the river Clyde." He adds in a note—" *Alteutha*, or rather *Balteutha*, "the town of Tweed—It is observable that all the "names in this poem are derived from the Galic "language; which is a proof that it was once the "universal language of the whole Island."

The edition now published, under the sanction of the Highland society, retains this note word for word, and thus translates the passage, quoted from the argument—"In terrâ Britonum inter muros, tempore Fingalis, duo erant principes; quorum alter, "Dunthalgo—*Teuthæ* (sive *Teudæ ut creditur*) "dominus erat; alter Rathmor—ad *Clutham* (cui "nunc etiam nomen *Cluda* est) habitavit."

Hence it appears that Macpherson grounded his topography of the dominions of these princes upon the knowledge, that Clutha meant the Clyde, and upon the probable conjecture, that *Teutha* was the *Tweed*: also that the editors of this work subscribed to his opinion—*Teutha, supposed to be the Tweed—Teutha, sive Tueda, ut creditur*. They also represent this poem, or traditional story, as of sufficient credit to establish an important historical fact. This appears from the note which Macpherson published,



and our editors adopted. They ought, therefore, to have regarded the Galic text as authentic and uncorrupted. But when we look into the Galic original now published, we find nothing of Macpherson's *Clutha*: the name is *Chuai*, throughout the poem. Macpherson's *Teutha* and *Alteutha* indeed occur. But in addition to these, the river *Tweed*, is discriminated by its plain modern name, *Tuaide* or *Tuaid*, for it is written both ways: and this is repeated no less than seventeen times. This remarkable circumstance must have been utterly unknown to Macpherson, at the time when he first translated the tale, and even, eleven years afterwards, when he revised his translation and notes. Macpherson was disposed to identify *Teutha* in the *Tweed*. Had the name *Tuaid*, therefore, occurred even once, in any copy known to the translator, he could not have been under the necessity of grounding his topography, upon the bare *supposition* that *Teutha* meant the *Tweed*. Consequently the present *original* of that *ancient* poem, which is of sufficient authority to ascertain the *universal language of the whole Island*, has undoubtedly been composed, or *put together*, since the year 1773.

Surely these gentlemen who could confront such an original with Mr. Macpherson's *argument*, and *notes*, without a single word of apology, must trifle strangely, not only with the public, but with their own literary reputation.

The Bard of Selma has been extremely cautious of exposing his person in an undress. Notwithstanding this excess of delicacy, we shall be able to catch a glimpse or two of him unawares, and contemplate the figure he makes, unadorned with the new robe, provided by his Caledonian friends.

In the year 1778, five years after the translation of Ossian had been finally revised, Dr. Shaw published his *Analysis of the Galic language*. In the 157th page of this work, the Doctor, who was at that time a zealous partizan of Ossian, gives fifty-seven lines of the original, from the beginning of *Croma*, together with a literal translation which, in every material point, agrees with Macpherson's. This *original* must, therefore, have corresponded, in the main, with that which Macpherson had used. When the Galic Ossian came out, I was eager to compare these lines published by Dr. Shaw, with the same passage, in the original of *Croma*. Dr. Smith's Dissertation and notes had already given me some suspicions; but I must acknowledge I was not a little surprised at the result of this experiment. It was not in favour of the *antiquity, authenticity, and inimitability* of Ossian's language. I shall take the liberty to confront these originals, in opposite pages, in the appendix.\* For this I need not apologize to the judicious reader, who must be convinced, that *one solid fact*, such as is involved

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\* No. ii.

in this compendious view, is worth a whole volume of circumstantial reasoning. He has here, before his eyes, two copies of one identical passage, in those poems which are ascribed to Ossian, and each of those copies from respectable authority. However uncouth the lines may appear to him, my insertion of them cannot help gratifying his curiosity, and more than this, flattering his pride, by making him a competent judge of the decisive historical fact which they disclose, and the clear light which they reflect upon a literary question, which, for the last five and forty years, has engaged the attention, and divided the opinion of the learned world. Will he not, after a deliberate comparison of these originals, resolve with me, that two persons, one residing in London, and the other at York, might take up an Eclogue of Virgil, at the same instant, and render them into English verse, with less diversity of phrase, than what we remark between the Ossian of 1773, and the Ossian of 1807? I think he must: for the difference, in this case, is not like that which critics remark, in comparing different copies of an ancient author. Instead of *two, three*, or, at most, *half a dozen* various readings, we have here, in the space of fifty-seven, or fifty-eight, short lines, more than *two hundred*, without reckoning the variations of orthography. There is but one line which the two copies express in the same *words*: and the lines, in general, are so very different, in their phrase and structure, that the copies must be ranked as distinct

versifications of one and the same passage, in a popular story. If one of these copies be *ancient* and *genuine*, the other must be *modern* and *spurious*: for it were folly to suppose, that they could have both descended together, from the remote age, to which they equally pretend. And if one be spurious, where are the distinguished credentials of the other? Critics of Caledonia! Here are two *Ossians*! which of them is the modern impostor; and which is the *ancient, authentic, and inimitable* Bard of Selma? It will be said that oral reciters may commit great mistakes—they may transpose paragraphs of the same poem, or erroneously introduce incidents from other poems. For such corruptions due allowance would be made. But the fact which we now contemplate is of a nature totally different from this. Here are not the marks of corruption but of re-composition: for the same thoughts, in both copies, follow one another in the very same order, only they are expressed throughout in different language. Here must, therefore, be manifest and wilful forgery, on one side, or on both; as it is impossible to conceive that Ossian's first rude sketches, and his finished pieces survived alike, in the mouths of the people, through fifty successive generations.

The collation of these *originals* reminds me of a passage in Dr. Smith's letter to Henry Mackenzie, Esq. dated 21st. June, 1802, and cited by Dr. M'Arthur, *Galic Ossian*, v. iii. p. 339.

“ That, at least, the *stamina*, the *bones*, *sinews*,  
“ and *strength*, of a *great part* of the poems ascri-  
“ bed to him (Ossian) are ancient, may, I think, be  
“ maintained on many good grounds. But that  
“ *some things modern* may have been superinduced,  
“ will, if not allowed, be at least, believed, on grounds  
“ of much probability ; and to *separate the one from*  
“ *the other is more than the translator himself*, were  
“ he alive, *could now do*, if he had not begun to do  
“ so from the beginning.” We have ocular demon-  
stration, that the *language* and *verse* of these poems  
do not come under the description of *stamina*,  
*bones*, &c. What then remains to the Bard ? Only  
the general subject matter—the *mere tales*. But if  
the unanimous opinion of Galic scholars, relative to  
these tales, is to be received, these *bones* of Ossian  
are scarcely more ancient than his tenderest *muscles*,  
or even the *paring of his nails*.

The writer of the letter cited above, was more in  
the secret of Ossian, than any other individual,  
excepting Macpherson himself, to whom we now  
revert. If this gentleman had not furnished the  
copy for the *Analysis*, he must, at least, have been  
well acquainted with it : for that work appeared  
more than twenty years before his death. Some  
time before his death he must also have possessed  
the copy published in 1807 : for he transcribed it  
into the poem of *Croma*, which he was preparing  
for the press. So that, having his choice of these  
two originals, he manifestly preferred the latter.

But in his translation of 1762, and in his revival of that translation in 1773, he followed the copy which was afterwards published by Dr. Shaw, or a copy to that effect. He could not, therefore, at either of these periods, have had the preferable copy of 1807 in his possession. Where was it then? It is not pretended that Macpherson collected any Galic originals, after the year 1762; and had the *genuine* copy fallen accidentally into his hands, between that time and 1773, he would surely have taken some notice of it in his revised edition of that year. This he has not done. He had not therefore obtained these *inimitable lines of Ossian*, from Scottish tradition, either by industry, or by accident.

The conclusion from all this is plain and obvious; namely, that, many years after the appearance of the English Ossian, either Macpherson himself, or some person acting in concert with him, was at the pains to recompose the poetical effusions of the Highlanders, and give them a national dress, which should be deemed worthy of their immortal Bard. Hence, beyond all doubt, arose that labour and fatigue of spirits, to which the translator alludes, when speaking of the original of Berrathon:—"He had only *put together* a few lines of it, and those "*not to his own liking; he had tired of it after a short sitting.*" I am heartily sorry his animal vigour was not more equal to the task: for, in consequence of its failure, this fine *ancient* poem still wants an *original*.

From the nature of the improvements which Macpherson made in the copy of *Croma*, it may be further collected, that, when he seriously turned his thoughts to the production of an *original* Ossian, he disregarded the credit of having been accurate and precise, in his own translation. This “ he resigned for ever to its fate.” To his new and arduous enterprize, he bent the whole force of his matured genius, and, like a staunch patriot, resolved that no private consideration should interfere with the honour of the Caledonian Bard.

Lest I should be thought to have laid too great stress upon this single proof, however decisive it may appear, I shall endeavour to provide it with one or two collateral supporters. In the mean time, I request the reader to compare Macpherson’s English of the old copy—at least, thirty years old—with the Latin version of the *new*, which I have subjoined in the appendix, to their respective originals, in order to evince the fact, that the recomposition of the Galic lines is sufficient to account for most of the defects imputed to the first translator. The particular phrases in which the Latin version varies from the other are warranted by the Galic copy of 1807, which affords abundant proof, that this was not the copy from which the English translation was made.

Let us now prove the integrity of the original Ossian, by the evidence of a gentleman who, next



to Macpherson himself, was best qualified to deliver an opinion upon this subject.

Dr. Smith's *Galic Antiquities* were published in the year 1780. In p. 300 of that work, the author points out a passage in the poem of *Cuthon*,—  
 “ Alluding to the death of Oscar, and the grief of  
 “ Brân (his dog) on that occasion; a scene, continues  
 “ the Doctor, so affecting, *that few passages of*  
 “ *Ossian are oftener repeated than that which de-*  
 “ *scribes it in these beautifully tender lines, which*  
 “ *I may be pardoned for giving in the ORIGINAL, as*  
 “ *the TRANSLATION is already so well known.*”  
 Here follow two Galic passages of eight lines each, from “TEMORA, b. 1.” And again, p. 316, of the same volume, our author thus refers to the above quotation:—“ In the passage cited in the note, p. 300, concerning the death of Oscar, there are, in almost all the editions I have met with of that piece, two lines (there marked in Italics) which intimate that their women were then present.” Hence it appears that these very passages were amongst the *best known* in the poems ascribed to Ossian—that they were supposed to have been the identical originals, from which Macpherson's translation of this part of *Temora* was produced; and that Dr. Smith, regarding them as *genuine* and *authentic*, quotes their authority for an ancient historical fact. Would it be imagined, after this, that not one of these sixteen *celebrated* and *well-known* lines is to be found in that copy of the original of *Temora*,

which was prepared for the press, by Macpherson himself? Such, however, is the case. Some of the same thoughts, indeed, are selected, and cast into verse; but the language and phraseology are totally different. The first passage runs thus, in OSSIAN of 1780:—

Chruinnich iad uine na sluaigh,  
'S gachaon neach ri buirich thouagh,  
Cha chaoineadh athair a mhac fein,  
'S cha ghuileadh a bhrathair e.  
*Cha chaoineadh piuthar a brathair,*  
*'S cha chaoineadh mathair a mac;*  
Ach iad uile anns a phlogail,  
A geur-chaoine' mo chaomh Oscair.

Compare with these lines the correspondent passage in OSSIAN of 1807:—

Cha robh bron air athair m'a mhac,  
Thuit an comhstri an tlachd oige,  
Ghluais iadsa gun deoir fo sgaile,  
'Nuair shinnte air lar ceann ant-sluaigh.

*Macpherson's translation:—*

And they did weep, O Fingal! Dear was the hero to their souls. He went out to the battle, and the foes vanished. He returned in peace amidst their joy. No father mourned his son slain in youth: no brother his brother of love. They fell without tears, for the chief of the people is low.

*Latin translation of 1807:—*

Haud fuit dolor patri circa snum filium,  
Qui ceciderat in conflictu, in decore suæ juventutis.  
Abierunt illi sine lacrymis sub umbram,  
Cum extenderetur super humum caput populi.

Macpherson's *literal* translation does not appear to come very close to either of these originals. He might have had a copy before him, materially different from both of them; as it is not improbable that every reciting Bard furnished his own version

of select passages, of the traditional tales. However that may have been, the *original* of 1807, widely differs from those celebrated strains of the Caledonian muse—those *beautifully tender lines*, which were oftenest repeated, and consequently, best known, and recognized by Dr. Smith and his countrymen, as the genuine work of Ossian. Let us consider the second passage.

OSSIAN of 1780 :—

Donnalaich nan con rem thaobh,  
 Agus buirich nan sean laoch,  
 Gul a phannail so co snitheach,  
 Sud is mo a chraidh mo chroidhe.  
 Cha d'fhidir duine roimhe riabh  
 Gur croidhe feola bh' ann chliabh ;  
 Ach croidhe do chuibhne cuir,  
 Air a cho'dacha le stailin.

OSSIAN of 1807 :—

Osna nan triath arda fo h-aois,  
 Caoine nan con, is am fonn  
 A briseadh trom o bheul nam bard ;  
 Leagh sud m'anam fein fo bhron  
 M'anam nach do leaghadh riamh  
 An comhstri nan sgiath no 'n comhrag ;  
 Bha e cos'lach ri cruaidh mo lainn.

*Macpherson's translation :—*

The groans of aged chiefs : the howling of my dogs : the sudden bursts of the song of grief, have melted Oscar's soul. My soul, that never melted before. It was like the steel of my sword.

*Latin translation of 1807 :—*

Suspiria procerum excelsorum sub senectute,  
 Ejulatus canum, et neniae  
 Erumpentes graves ab ore bardorum ;  
 Solverunt illa meum animum ipsius sub dolore,  
 Meum animum qui haud solutus est unquam  
 In conflictu clypeorum, nec in certamine ;  
 Erat ille similis duræ (chalybi) mei gladii.

Whatever may be said as to Macpherson's fidelity, in translating either of these copies, one fact must be clear to the slightest inspection of the reader ; namely, that the verses which, in 1780, were accredited by Dr. Smith, as the genuine productions of Ossian, and the copy of the same identical passage, published in 1807, under the sanction of the Highland society, *are not the same*. They differ entirely from each other, in their structure and phraseology. How can we reason justly upon this fact, and at the same time, preserve due respect to those Galic scholars, who maintain the genuineness of Ossian's poems ? Had I asserted in 1804, when I drew up the former part of this Essay, that the verses produced by Dr. Smith are *modern* and *spurious*, I should, undoubtedly, have incurred the general imputation of *ignorance*, *prejudice*, and the *grossest illiberality*, in questioning the veracity of a *whole nation*. Were I, at this moment, to deny the authenticity of the *new copy*, I should expose myself to the like censure. And yet, surely, I have a right to believe my own eyes, and to declare the conviction of my understanding, that these copies cannot possibly be deemed one and the same composition ; consequently, one or both of them *must be spurious*. Why, then, should the dread of a few hard epithets, which have already been liberally bestowed upon my betters, restrain me from avowing my honest opinion, that, at the time when Macpherson was preparing his Galic text, he did not believe

the language and the verse of Ossian to be either *ancient* or *inimitable*: that, therefore, whenever he found it convenient, he utterly disregarded the language and idiom, even of those fragments which were *best known*, and most generally recited in the country, and made the Bard of Selma utter the words which he chose to put into his mouth. Consequently, he must have judged rightly, in keeping back his *originals*, till the oral reciters had gone out of his way. If this opinion be not admitted, as a solution of the whole mystery, I know of but one other, which can pertinently be brought forward; namely, what I have suggested already—that the utterly discordant copies, of the same passage, are to be regarded as versifications of the same incident, in a popular tale, made by several Bards, unconnected with each other. I am disposed to admit both these schemes, in their proper places: for the present Galic copy, has, evidently, much matter, which Macpherson had not before him, at the time when he translated; therefore he has partly composed his originals since that time: and we learn from Dr. Smith, and from other abundant evidence, that, independent of Macpherson, there was great discrepancy, as to language and verse, in the several oral recitals of the same paragraphs; therefore several Bards must have exercised their talents in versifying the same incidents of the traditional tales. But how will the authenticity of Ossian stand affected by this view of the subject? The tales are allowed to be

the pure invention of the Bards within the last four or five hundred years. They are therefore modern, and unfounded in historical fact. But the poems are founded upon the tales. Does it therefore follow that they must be ancient and authentic? Again: it appears evident that the poems have been produced by several unconnected composers; and are we hence to conclude that they are all the work of one and the same man, and that this man was Ossian! I cannot make it out. The facts upon which I reason are before the reader—let him make the best he can of them.

I beg leave to refer to my appendix\* for an additional proof of modern composition, in which we may dispense with the interposition of Dr. Shaw, Dr. Smith, or any third person whatsoever. Macpherson stands opposed to himself, and gives us a fair criterion of his *fidelity*, in preserving the *genuine text* of Ossian. In his translation of the third book of *Fingal*, he had introduced the hero of that name, giving his grandson Oscar some military precepts, which he exemplifies and enforces, by the episode of *Fainavolis*. In preparing the text of the Galic Ossian, he preserved the substance of these *precepts*, but judging the episode to be out of place, he wholly rejected it. Here we perceive that he was, at this time, more anxious to render the *original* Ossian perfect, than to preserve the credit

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\* No. iii.

of his own translation. A copy of the episode, however, with the speech prefixed to it, was suffered to remain amongst his papers, and the editors of the Galic Ossian published it, in their third volume. We have thus two copies of the same identical passage, in the principal poem, ascribed to the Caledonian Homer. And it appears, upon examination, that the one is diffused through thirty-eight lines, expressed in the trivial style of an old ballad; whilst the other is compressed into twenty lines, displaying all the dignity of the epic muse. If it be said that the latter consists of the most beautiful thoughts, selected out of the former; still I must insist upon it, that the selection has been made by some modern, who not only *abridged*, but also *composed*, in the name of Ossian: for I remark a difference in the language and structure of *every one of the lines*. The mass of matter is indeed the same; but it has undergone a repeated fusion, and been hammered out into a different form. This is not the work of the *file*, but of the *forge*. I am at a loss to conjecture how such examples as these are to be reconciled to the assertion of those Galic scholars, who contend, that *the language of these poems is of great antiquity, and could not be imitated in modern times*.

To these assertions I have opposed plain facts. I have compared various copies of four distinct passages in these poems, amounting altogether, to about a hundred lines in each copy: and in that



whole number, I find but *one line* expressed in the same words by any two copies, which chance has thrown in my way. A discrepancy like this could not have descended from the genuine labours of one ancient author, through the oral tradition of fifteen centuries. It follows, that certain copies, of all these passages, must be modern fabrications. And if modern genius was competent to perform so much, for the venerable Ossian, why are we to suppose that it has not performed the whole? For my own part, I must freely confess that, instead of finding in these *originals* a convincing argument, that the genuine works of Ossian have come down through so many ages, by oral tradition; I discover undeniable proofs that Ossian, even when committed to writing in the middle of the eighteenth century, and entrusted to the hands of Mr. Macpherson, the best friend he ever had in the world, has not been able to preserve his own identity, for the short period of forty years—within that space, we perceive the *chrysalis* converted into a *butterfly*. But how this conversion was effected; whether Mr. Macpherson fabricated one of these copies from the other, or produced them both, in succession, from a traditional tale of the Highland peasants, must now remain a secret, as we receive the whole through the medium of his handwriting. I only contend that there is fabrication in the case, and that the date of it cannot be remote.

The facts which I have stated in these sections, and a multitude of similar facts, which, at present, I have not leisure to investigate, must, surely, have been known to those learned and ingenious writers, who have undertaken the defence of Ossian. But unfortunately, these gentlemen have not hitherto permitted themselves *to doubt*: they have not therefore weighed the evidence on both sides, or qualified themselves for the province of impartial critics. Had Ossian preferred his claims in a court of justice, his advocates, in the long robe, might do right, in studiously bringing forward, amplifying, and enforcing every shadow of evidence in his favour, dissembling and keeping in the dark every thing that would make against him, and pleading, not *for the truth*, but *for the cause*. But very different from this is the candour of scholars, before the bar of the public. It should be their first care, to guard themselves against the illusions of prepossession. Of the strong influence of this affection, I shall select one remarkable instance.

In the third volume of this edition of Ossian, published *under the sanction of the Highland Society*, a distinguished Galic scholar has undertaken to ascertain the topography of Fingal's Palace at *Selma*, or *Taura*, and with this view quotes the following paragraph, from *The Fall of Taura*, published by Dr. Smith, as a poem of the celebrated Caledonian Bard :—

Thaincas o Arda le buaidh,  
 Gu h uallach air steuda nan coigreach,  
 'S ar gean mar ghathaibh na greine  
 'S i luidhe siar air sleibhte Thaura.  
 Chiteadh am fe na fairge  
 Coillte le 'n carraigibh eighinn,  
 'S clann ag amharc le ioghnadh  
 Air smuidean Thaura fluidhe.  
 Mar bhogh na fraois air sleibhte,  
 Bha oighean aoibhin nar coail  
 A' seinn caithream nan ceud clar,  
 Le manran binn an orain.

*Which lines are thus translated:—*

" We came from Arda with victory,  
 " Lofty on the steeds of the strangers,  
 " And our joy was like the beams of the sun,  
 " On the hills of Taura, when setting in the west.  
 " There were seen in the calm face of the sea  
 " Woods with their ivy-covered rocks,  
 " And children looking with wonder  
 " At the smoke of Taura below.  
 " Like the rainbow on the hills,  
 " Our joyful virgins came forth to meet us,  
 " Singing triumph with a hundred harps,  
 " Accompanied by the sweet voice of the song."

As Dr. Smith had candidly acknowledged that several paragraphs in the poems which he published, *as OSSIAN's*, were composed by himself from the *recent tales*, it is scarcely to be conceived that this gentleman should have quoted, and translated the passage before us, as an historical document, without having, first of all, just looked at the translation given by the original editor, in his *Galic Antiquities*, p. 315. And if this natural precaution was taken, it is scarcely possible but that the eye must have glanced upon the note, at the bottom of the page,

to which we are directed by an asterisk. Here we are told in plain terms, that “ *The most of this paragraph, with some others that follow, particularly before and after the song of the old Bard, have been supplied from the tales, as the versification is broken and defective.*”

Here, then, in the *avowed composition of Dr. Smith*, who wrote in the year 1780, we have Ossianic verse, and Ossianic language, extracted from the *Ur-sgeuls*, which the Doctor himself regards as “ *later tales,*” and ascribes to the pure invention of modern times. And this whole paragraph, not merely *suspicious*, but *avowedly spurious*, is adduced as the genuine work of Ossian, by a distinguished Galic scholar, and published under the sanction of the Highland Society, as an authentic document of ancient history, because the prepossession of these gentlemen will not allow them *to doubt the credit of any thing* which appears in their language, worthy of Ossian, and marked by his name. Let this instance remind them, that when they pronounce the language of Ossian to be *of great antiquity*, and such as *could not be imitated in modern times*, they may be *mistaken*.

‘To the above passage, which introduces the *virgins with their hundred harps and song of victory*, Dr. Smith immediately annexes the song itself, which they chaunted upon the occasion. It is therefore highly probable, that this also is included in the paragraphs which he composed out

of the *later tales*: at least, the sweeping clause in his note—*some others that follow*—gives it a most suspicious character. Our author, however, introduces thirty-two lines of this song, with the following preface:—"That the *Romans* were the enemies "whom the Fingalians *completely defeated* and "dispersed at Arda, APPEARS EVIDENT, from part "of the same poem being the song of triumph, "which the maids of Morven sung, when they "came forth to congratulate their heroes on their "return."

Thus a known composition of the latter part of the eighteenth century—a composition from materials confessedly modern and fabulous—is ostentatiously brought forward, as a document of sufficient credit and authority, singly, to establish an important fact in ancient history. So little care have these gentlemen taken to examine the grounds of the opinion which they publish to the world; or else, so studious have they been to veil, even from their own reflection, every circumstance that might tend to invalidate the claims of these poems, to remote antiquity and historical credit.

Notwithstanding these operations of prepossession, I have succeeded in producing a series of direct proofs, that Macpherson, or his friends, did recompose several, even of those fragments of verse which the Highlanders recited, and did utterly transform, or new model, their language and structure, before they were transcribed for the press, as the *original*

works of Ossian. And the conductors of this splendid edition have not enabled me to point out a single passage, which has not undergone the same operation.

Had the partizans of the Celtic Bard allowed themselves to hesitate and reflect, they would have found all the facts which I adduce, open to their own investigation. I cite only *Galic* authorities, and the friends of the *Galic cause*. My evidence results wholly from the *cross examination* of their own witnesses, of whose integrity and discretion they ought to have been well assured, before they produced them, at the bar of the public, with such undaunted confidence, such proud anticipation of victory, such prospective triumph.

To the friends of Ossian it can be no secret that, when Macpherson persisted in promising, yet, for the space of forty years, persisted in withholding, his *Galic* copy, he was strongly suspected of being employed in composing his originals. It now appears that, either by his own exertions, or through the medium of his friends, he did much in that way; and let me ask our editors what proof have they given, that he did not do all? I would not be understood to insinuate, that he invented the *stories* of the several poems: these he found in the traditional tales which he has pretty fully characterized, and in fragments of traditional verse, which, for the most part, he deemed unworthy of Ossian, as appears from a *detection* of the care he took, to



exhibit great part of his originals, in *new language* and *new verse*. I am restrained from the inference, that this is the case with the whole of these originals, not by the evidence nor the arguments of our editors, but by the remarks I have made, that several passages exhibit greater attention, in the composer, to the rules of Irish prosody, than Macpherson and his friends seem to have paid. Here is a presumptive proof, that certain parts of these very originals are as old as the seventeenth century; but where shall we look for another proof? The Galic text of the poems here published amounts to nearly ten thousand lines. It is given entirely from copies in Macpherson's own handwriting, or copies which he caused to be written. We are told much of old manuscripts, and transcripts, taken at various times, from oral recitations. Can the friends of Ossian, *as men of honour*, produce twenty connected verses, from any attested copy, not less than sixty years old, that shall correspond, I do not say in *orthography*, but, in language and phraseology with any one passage in these ten thousand lines? The anxiety which they have manifested to defend the credit of their Bard induces me to believe, that they would have done this, had it been in their power; but they have not favoured us with a single line. Till this be done, and, considering the present complexion of the case, something more than this, I apprehend the public will henceforth acquiesce in the opinion, that not a paragraph in



these poems can be relied upon, as the genuine production of Ossian, as an authentic document of history, as a real specimen of the Highland language, such as it was three hundred years ago, or, at any earlier period.

It is now time to bring this discussion to a conclusion. I hope that, in the course of my Essay, I have not dropped a single expression personally offensive to the writers whom I oppose, or nationally injurious to the brave Caledonians. Should the reader remark a sentence that can bear such a construction, I hereby publicly apologize for the inadvertency of which I may have been guilty, solemnly declaring, that I entertain the most cordial respect both for the individuals and the people. As the adversary of Ossian, I am aware that I may have incurred some displeasure. All who have taken the side of the question on which I happen to stand, from Johnson down to the writer of a paragraph in a magazine, have been arraigned and condemned of *ignorance* and *prejudice*, both of them capital crimes at the *critical* bar of Scotland, and crimes to which no mercy has hitherto been extended. I submit to my fate: but before I am led forth to literary execution, I beg leave to make a short and candid confession.

About five and thirty years ago, I was, like many other young men, forcibly struck with the beauties and novelty of Macpherson's publication. Whitaker's Manchester strengthened my predilec-

tion in favour of the Galic Bard, and gave me a high notion of the historical credit that was due to him. When Dr. Smith's *Galic Antiquities* appeared, I procured the book with eagerness, and was transported with the promise of his *Sean Dana*, or *Originals*, of the poems he had published in English. Ossian was now my favourite companion. I had versified several books of the *Temora*; with the help of Llwyd I began to translate Smith's Galic specimens, and formed a resolution to learn the language, that I might be ready to receive the venerable Bard, when his name should be announced to the public. However *ignorant* I may have been at this period, I trust the Ossianists will readily acquit me of the charge of *prejudice* against their favourite cause.

But a close examination of Dr. Smith's *Dissertations and Notes*, began to set the subject in a new point of light. These were compared with Macpherson's *Preface, Dissertations, Arguments, and Notes*, with an occasional glance at the poems themselves; and I seemed, gradually, to perceive, that I had been too incautious an admirer of Ossian. If it be *prejudice* to give up a favourite notion, reluctantly, and inch by inch, as it was extorted from me, by the strong hand of conviction—hence arose my prejudice.

Ossian was now laid aside, till the year 1804, when a design I had formed, of examining some remains of our old Welsh Bards, reminded me of

the renowned prince of Selma. I began to reconsider my sentiments upon this subject, and the observations I then made were thrown together into a short Essay, which, from that time to the present, has either been in the hands of a few select friends, or reposed very innocently in my desk. As the last means of conquering my *ignorance* and *prejudice*, I procured a copy of the *Galic originals*, which were published in 1807 : the result is now before the reader.

I trust even Ossian himself could not lay to my charge, that I am an ungenerous foe. In forming and declaring my opinion, I have not dwelt upon the objections of his avowed adversaries. Taking up the arguments of his friends, with a strong original bias in their favour, I found, upon calm examination, that many of them were highly absurd, and all of them fallacious and inconclusive. I also considered the internal evidence of the Galic poems, and these discover evident marks of recent composition. They exhibit the principles of a prosody which cannot be deemed ancient ; and, in every instance where I have had an opportunity of comparing the present text with other copies, it appears that they have been so much altered, since the middle of the eighteenth century, as scarcely to have retained their identity for the last fifty years. For these reasons, and others which have been stated, I feel myself impressed with the conviction, that not a single page of the work before

us, has existed three hundred years, in its present language and form. Certain rude tales, indeed, relative to *Fionn Mac Coul* and his connections, may have been known in the country, something earlier. But *Fionn* himself has undergone great changes. In the high day of romance, he was a gigantic demon, that *troubled all the air* with his *frowns*; and made *the world schog* when he danced. In more recent times, he humanized his manners, contracted his stature, lengthened his name, and was transformed into a princely hero, one of the most amiable and noble that has ever been delineated by the epic muse. If I am wrong in this opinion, I must transfer the blame, not to the avowed adversaries of Ossian, but to Mr. Macpherson, Dr. Blair, Dr. Smith, Sir John Sinclair, and the Galic Bard himself.

Upon the whole, I think Macpherson was unfortunate, in making his first stand upon untenable ground, the precarious defence of which has embarrassed both himself and his ingenious countrymen, for nearly fifty years. He taught the public to expect *the genuine works of Ossian, a Caledonian Bard of the third century*. Hence arose the mischief. It would have been well if, instead of this, he had stated something to the following effect:—That the order of Bards which remained in Scotland, down to the eighteenth century, left behind them many heroic tales, relative to Fionn and his connections—that various parts of these tales had been

versified, in the name of Ossian, the son of Fionn—that, from the Bards, several of the people had learned these tales and fragments of verse, which they still repeated, as the works of Ossian—that many of these fragments were composed in a superior style, and in good taste; and that, by a due arrangement and connection, which the tales themselves would suggest, the same fragments of verse, carefully selected, and occasionally improved in their language, might be modelled into poems, which, even in the present day, would be entitled to considerable respect.

This, I believe, is very near the truth; and if it had been simply told at first, it would have prevented all the serious debates, which have occurred upon the subject of Ossian's poems. To the proof of this statement, the Galic scholars would have been fully competent. They have proved it in every point; but, with all their efforts, their ingenuity, and their zeal, they have not been able to make good their ground, a single step beyond this.

And what would the brave Caledonians lose by the candid avowal, were it now to be made? It might compel them to abate something of their *new* pretensions to early refinement, and to the possession of an ancient, uncorrupted language: on the other hand, it would remove their temptation to violate all history of their own country, and of the Celtic nations in general. The merit of these interesting compositions, would still be their own:

for the slender aid which their Bards have derived from Ireland, could hardly be deemed a drawback upon their fame. What critic detracts an atom from the fame of Virgil, because Homer composed in hexameter verse, and sung the tale of Troy, some ages before the Roman Poet was born? Instead of vaunting of one solitary poetic genius, whose very existence is not recognized by history, the proud Caledonian nation might justly boast of many: instead of recording, that the harp had sounded amongst their mountains in an age with which we have very little to do at present, they might declare to the world, that the muse still loves to haunt their romantic glens, the banks of their wizard streams, and the recesses of their echoing rocks. Would the reputation of living genius do less credit to their country, than the bare recollection of a Bard, of whom, according to their computation, it could only be said, in the last fifteen centuries—*Ossian has been!*

But, at whatsoever period, and by whomsoever these poems were composed, I am by no means disposed to detract from their intrinsic merit. They do credit to Caledonia. The Galic originals constitute a splendid monument of its language. The *Fingal* and *Temora*, upon subjects so interwoven with the feelings of the people, set this corner of the island far above poetic competition, not only with any Celtic tribe, but, we may almost say, with any nation in Europe.

What people, now existing, can boast of epic poems, so interesting, so original, so replete with generous sentiment, and, at the same time, so nationally appropriate? The man who believes himself descended from Fingal, from either of his heroes, or even from the nation which produced such characters, must be a degenerate wretch indeed, if he can do otherwise than think nobly, and act honourably.



## APPENDIX.



No. I.

Some passages of an old Irish poem (published in the Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy for the year 1788), converted into Welsh, by a mere change of the orthography.

WELSH :—

Suile sior shluaghach  
Dealbha dea ghmomhach  
Feardha fíor bhuadhach  
Maiseac mor fhuighleach  
Goll borb beimionnach  
Curadh cruadh reannach  
Dogbhuibh eireannach  
Colg lom luath bhuilleach  
Flaith na bhfoghla creach  
Cliath na Ceonnasach  
En fhear iomarcach  
Tren fhear trom fholtach  
Sgiath na sgeimhioltach.

*The same, in Welsh orthography:—*

Gwlydd hir-luawg  
 Delwydd da gniviawg  
 Gwrddde gwir-vuddiawg  
 Moesawg mawr chwedlawg  
 Coll bûr bu-mŷnawg  
 Gwr-aidd gwrdd rannawg.  
 Dyg-vudd Werddonawg  
 Col lom lwth-bwyllawg.  
 Llüydd llith-breiddiawg  
 Clwyd y Connasawg  
 Yn wr hyvarchawg  
 Trinwr trwmwalltawg  
 Ysgwydd ysgyvliawg.

The following extract, from the beginning of the poem, contains the longest interruption in the rhyme; but as this also is in *old* Irish, it becomes Welsh, by a mere change of the orthography:—

Goll mear mileata  
 Ceap na crodhachta  
 Laimh fhial arrachta  
 Mian na mordhasa  
 Mur leim lanteinne  
 Fraoch nach bhfuarthear  
 Laoch go lan ndealbhaigh  
 Reim an richuraibh  
 Leomhan luatharmach  
 A leonadh biodhbhaidh  
 Ton ag tream tuarguin  
 Goll na nguath iorguil  
 Nar thraoch a threin tachar  
 Agh gan fuarachuaigh  
 Mhal aig meadachuaigh  
 Laoch ghacha lamhach  
 Leomhan lonn ghuionhach  
 Beodha binn dhuanach  
 Creasach comhdhalach  
 Euchteach iolbhudhach.

*The same, in Welsh orthography:—*

Coll, mùr milëddau  
 Cyf y creuddogau  
 Llaw hael arachau  
 Mŷn y mordasau  
 Mur-llam llawntandde  
 Grugiawg vuarthawr  
 Llûch llawn dyvinaidd  
 Rhwyv y rhîwraidd  
 Llew-vin llwth arvawg  
 A ellynoedd buddvaidd  
 Ton a thrîn terwyn  
 Coll, y gnawd orchwyl  
 Nid trech yn trin tachar  
 Ag anhwyredig  
 Maelawg mwyedig  
 Llûch a gwyhlawiawg  
 Llew-vin llawngniviawg  
 Bywiawg, bendannawg  
 Cresawg, cyvdalawg  
 Eigiawg hollvuddiawg.

## No. II.

Two copies of *Malvina's Dream*, in the beginning of *Croma*, compared line by line.

Ossian of 1778, published in Shaw's *Analysis*, p. 157 :—

'S e guth anaim mo ruin a tha 'nn,  
 O ! 's ainmach gu aislin Mhalmin' thu,  
 Fosgluibh-se talla nan speur,  
 Aithra *Oscair* nan cruaidh-bheum ; (l. *Thoscair*)  
 Fosgluibh-se doirsa nan nial,  
 Tha ceumma Mhalmhine go dian.  
 Chualam guth a' m' aislin fein,  
 Tha sathrum mo chleibh go ard.  
 C'uime thanic an ossag a' m' dheigh  
 O dhubh-shiubhal na linne od thall ?  
 Bha do sgiath fhuimmach ann gallan an aonaich,  
 Shiubhall aislin Mhalmhine go dian,  
 Ach chunic is a run ag aomadh  
 'S a cheo-earradh ag aomadh m' a chliabh ;  
 Bha dearsa na greine air thaobh ris,  
 Co boigal ri or nan diamh.  
 'S e guth anaim mo ruin a tha 'nn,  
 O ! 's ainmach gu m' aislin fein thu.  
 'S comhnuidh dhuit anam Mhalmhine,  
 Mhic Ossain is treine lamh.  
 Dh' eirich m' osna marri dearsa o near,  
 Thaom mo dheoir measg shioladh na hoiche.  
 Bu ghallan Aluin a' t'fhanuis mi *Oscair*,  
 Le m' uile ghenga uaine ma m' thimchiol ?  
 Ach thanic do bhas-sa mar ossaig  
 O 'n fhasach, us dhaom mi sios.  
 Thanic earrach le sioladh nan speur,  
 Cho d' eirich duill' uaine dhamh fein ;  
 Chnuc oigha me samhach 's an talla,  
 Agus bhuail iad clairsach nan fonn.  
 Bha deoir ag taomadh le gruaidhan Mhalmhine ;  
 Chnuc oigh 's mo thuiradh gu trom.  
 C' nime am bheil thu co tuirsach a' m' fhannis  
 Chaomh Ainnir-og Luath-ath nan sruth.  
 An ro e sgiamhach mar dhearsa na greine ?  
 An bu cho tlachdor a shiubhal 's a cluth ?

Ossian of 1807, published by the Highland Society, v. i. p. 211:  
From Macpherson's papers :—

'S e guth ciuin mo ruin a t' ann !  
 Neo-mhinic gann gu m' aisling fein thu,  
 Fosglaihb sibhs' blur talla thall,  
 Shinns're Thoscair nan ard speur;  
 Fosglaihb sibhise dorsa nan neul,  
 Tha Malmhina gu dian fo dheur.  
 Chualam guth measg m' aisling fein ;  
 Tha forum mo chleibhe gu h-ard.  
 C' uim' a thainig an osag' na dheigh,  
 O dhubh-shiubhal na linne thall ?  
 Do sgiath fhuaimnear an gallana 'n aoinaich  
 Threig aisling Malmhina air sliabh.  
 Chunnaic is' a run ag aomadh  
 Ceo-earradh a' taomadh mu 'n triath.  
 Dearrsa na greine mar thaobh ris  
 'S e boilsgeadh mar or nan dainh.  
 'S e guth ciuin mo ruin a t' ann ;  
 Neo-mhinic gann do m' aisling fein thu.  
 'S e do chomhnuidhse m' anam fhein,  
 A siol Oisein, a 's treine lamh ;  
 Eiridh m' osna am maduinn gan fheum,  
 Mo dheoir mar shileadh speura ard  
 A tuiteam mall o ghruaidh na h-oiche.  
 Bu chrann aillidh mi, threin nan seod,  
 Oscair chorr, le geugaibh cubhaidh,  
 'Nuair thainig bas, mar ghaoth nan torr ;  
 Fo sgeith thuit mo cheann fo smur.  
 Thainig earrach caoin fo bhraon ;  
 Cha d' eirich duilleag fhaoin dhomh fein.  
 Chunnaic oigh mi, 's mi fo shamh chair thall ;  
 Bhual clarsaiche mall nan teud.  
 Chunnaic oigh mi, 's mi cumhadh fo ghradh,  
 C' uime cho truagh tha lamh-gheul nam beus ?  
 Cheud ainneir o Latha nan sian,  
 An robh Oscar gu trian do luaidh  
 Anns a mhaduinn mar dhearrsa o ghrein,

## Ossian of 1778 :—

'S taitnach tfhonn an cluais Ossain,  
 Nighain Luath-ath nan sruth dian.  
 Thainic guth nam bard nach beo,  
 Am measg t aislin air aomadh nan sliabh,  
 Nuair thuit codal air do shuilan soirbh,  
 Aig cuan mor-shruth nan ioma fuaim,  
 Nuair phil thu flathal o 'n t seilg,  
 'S grian la thu ag sgaolta na bein.  
 Chual thu guth nam bard nach beo :  
 'S glan faital do chiuil fein.  
 'S caoin faital nam fonn, o Mhalmhine !  
 Ach claonidh iad anam gu deoir ;  
 Tha solas ann Tuiradh le sioth,  
 Nuair dh' aomas cliabh tuirse gu bron :  
 Ach claoidhibh fad thuirse siol dorthuin,  
 Fhlath nighain *Oscair* nan cruaidh-bheum.  
 'S ainmach an la gan nial  
 Thuitas iad, mar chuisag, fo 'n ghrian,  
 Nuair sheallas i sios 'n a soilse,  
 Andeigh do 'n dubh cheathach siubhal do 'n bheinn  
 'S a throm-chean fo shioladh na h oiche.

*Mr. Macpherson's translation :—*

It was the voice of my love !  
 Seldom art thou in the dreams of Malvina !  
 Open your airy halls,  
 O fathers of Toscar of shields !  
 Unfold the gates of your clouds :  
 The steps of Malvina are near.  
 I have heard a voice in my dream.  
 I feel the fluttering of my soul.  
 Why didst thou come, O blast !  
 From the dark-rolling face of the lake ?  
 Thy rustling wing was in the tree ;  
 The dream of Malvina fled.  
 But she beheld her love,  
 When his robe of mist flew on the wind.  
 A sun-beam was on his skirts :  
 They glittered like the gold of the stranger.

## Ossian of 1807 :—

Ian aille do mhiann fo chruaidh ?  
 Caoin am fonn na mo chluais fein,  
 A nighean Latha nan sruth fiar,  
 An cual' thu guth nach 'eil beo sa'bheinn,  
 An aisling, ann do chadal ciar,  
 'Nuair thuit clos air do shuilibh mall,  
 Air bruachan Morshruth nan toirn beura ?  
 'Nuair thearnadh leat o sheilg nan carn,  
 An latha ciuin ard ghrian sua speura ?  
 Chuala tu barda nam fonn.  
 'S taitneach, ach trom do ghuth,  
 'S taitneach, a Mhalmhina, nan sonn ;  
 Leaghaidh bron am bochd anam, tha dubh.  
 Tha aoibhneas ann am bron le sith,  
 'Nuair shuidhicheas ard stri a bhroin ;  
 Caitbidh cumha na tursaich gun bhrigh,  
 Gann an lai an tir nan seod,  
 A nighean Thoscair, a 's aillidh' snuagh.  
 Tuitidh iad mar dhithein sìos  
 Air an caoinhid grian neartor na soillse,  
 'Nuair luidheas an dealt air a' chliabh,  
 'S a throm cheann fo shian na h-oidhche.

*Translation of 1807 :—*

Est vox lenis mei amantis quæ adest !  
 Infrequens rara ad meum ipsius somnium tu venis.  
 Aperite vos vestrum domicilium ultra (nubes)  
 Proavi Toscaris arduarum sphærarum ;  
 Aperite vos portas nubium.  
 Est Malvina vehementer sub lacrymis.  
 Audivi ego vocem inter mea ipsius insomnia ;  
 Est strepitus mei pectoris *altisona*.  
 Quare venit flamen post eam (scilicet vocem)  
 Ab atro cursu gurgitis adversi ?  
 Ad ejus alam sonorem in arbore jugi  
 Reliquit somnium Malvinam in clivo.  
 Vidit illa amantem se declinantem,  
 Vaporosâ veste effusâ circa principem,  
 Radiatione solis, instar lateris ei,  
 Corruscante ut aurum advenarum.



It was the voice of my love!  
Seldom comes he to my dreams!  
But thou dwellest in the soul of Malvina,  
Son of the mighty Ossian!  
My sighs arise with the beam of the east;  
My tears descend with the drops of night.  
I was a lovely tree in thy presence, Oscar,  
With all my branches around me;  
But thy death came, like a blast from the desert,  
And laid my green head low.  
The spring returned with its showers;  
No leaf of mine arose.  
The virgins saw me silent in the hall;  
They touched the harp of joy.  
The tear was on the cheek of Malvina:  
The virgins beheld me in my grief.  
Why art thou sad, they said,  
Thou fairest of the maids of Lutha!  
Was he lovely as the beam of the morning,  
And stately in thy sight?  
Pleasant is thy song to Ossian's ear,  
Daughter of streamy Lutha!  
Thou hast heard the music of departed bards,  
In the dream of thy rest,  
When sleep fell on thine eyes,  
At the murmur of Moruth.  
When thou didst return from the chase,  
In the day of the sun,  
Thou hast heard the music of bards,  
And thy song is lovely!  
It is lovely, O Malvina;  
But it melts the soul.  
There is a joy in grief,  
When peace dwells in the breast of the sad:  
But sorrow wastes the mournful,  
O daughter of Toscar,  
And their days are few.  
They fall away like the flower  
On which the sun has looked in his strength,  
After the mildew has past over it,  
When its head is heavy with the drops of night.

Est vox lenis mei amantis quæ adest!  
 Infrequens rara ad meum ipsius somnium tu venis.  
 Est tuum domicilium animus meus,  
 O semen Ossiani, ejus strenuissima manus;  
 Surgunt mea suspiria in matutino tempore (inutiliter) sine usu,  
 Et meæ lacrymæ instar guttarum cœli ardui  
 Cadentium lente e genâ noctis.  
 Fui arbor pulchra ego, strenuissime heroum,  
 Oscar eximie, cum meis ramis fragrantibus,  
 Quando venit mors, sicut ventus tumulorum;  
 Sub ejus alâ cecidit meum cæruleum caput sub pulverem.  
 Venit ver blandum sub imbre;  
 Non ortum est folium tenerum mihi ipsi.  
 Conspexerunt virgines me sub silentio ex adverso;  
 Percusserunt citharas lentas chordarum.  
 Conspexerunt virgines me lugentem sub amore.  
 Quare tam tristis est manus candida leporum (charitatum)?  
 Prima virgo Lothæ (nimbosæ) nimborum,  
 An fuit Oscar perpetuo tuæ laudis (thema)  
 In matutino tempore sicut radiatio solis,  
 Plenus pulchritudinis, tuæ deliciæ, sub durâ armaturâ?  
 Blandum est tuum carmen meæ ipsius auri,  
 Nympha Lothæ torrentium flexuosorum,  
 An audivisti tu vocem, quæ non est viva in monte,  
 In somnio, in tuo sopore obscuro,  
 Quando cecidit quies super oculos lentos  
 In præcipitiis Moruthi murmurarum placidarum:  
 Quando descendebatur a te a venatu molium-saxearum,  
 In die tranquillo ardui solis cœlorum?  
 Audivisti tu bardos (canoros) modorum.  
 Est jucunda, at est (mæsta) gravis, tua vox,  
 Jte unda est, Malvina, filia heroum,  
 (Solvit) Liquefacit luctus miseram animam, quæ est (tristis) atra.  
 Est gaudium in luctu cum pace,  
 Quando subsidit arduum certamen (luctuosum) luctûs;  
 Consumit dolor lugubres sine fructu (inutiliter);  
 Angusti sunt eorum dies in terrâ fortium,  
 O filia Toscaris, ejus venustissima est forma.  
 Cadunt illi ut flores deorsum  
 In conspectu solis validi lucis,  
 Quando jacet ros super ejus comas,  
 Ejus gravi capite existente sub nimbo noctis.

## No. III.

Fingal's address to his grandson, Oscar, introductory to the original episode of Fainasolis, from Mr. Macpherson's papers, published by the Highland Society, v. iii. p. 486 :—

Mhic mo mhic; 'se thuairt an Rìgh,  
 Oseair, a Rìgh nan òg flath!  
 Chunnaic mi dearsa do lainn  
 Mar dealan bheann san stoirm.  
 Thuit an namh fo d' laimh san iomairt  
 Mar dhuilleach fo osaig gbeamhrai.  
 Lean gu dlu ri cliu do shinnsir,  
 A 's na dìbir bhi mar iad san  
 'Nuair bu bheo Treunmor nan rath,  
 As Trathal athair nan treun laoch,  
 Chuir iad gach cath le buaidh,  
 As bhuannaich iad cliu gach tughmhuil.  
 Mairi marsin an iomra san dan,  
 Sbhithidh luaidh orr'aig baird nan deigh.  
 Oseair! claidhsa lamh threun a choraig;  
 Ach caomhuinn an conui 'n ti 's laige.  
 Bi mar bhuinn'-shruth rethoirt geamhrai,  
 Cas ri namhuid trom na Feinne;  
 Ach mar aile tla an t samhrai  
 Dhoibhsan ata faun nan eigin.  
 San marsin bha Treunmor riamh,  
 'S bha Trathal gach ial mar sin:  
 Ghluais Cumhal na 'n cenmaibh corr,  
 'S bhu Fhionn un conui leis an lag.  
 'Nan aobhar shinean mo lamh,  
 'S le failte rachain nan coinneamh,  
 A's gheibheadh iad fagsa, a's caird,  
 Fo sgail dhrillinich mo lainne.  
 Tair cha d' rinneas air aon neach  
 Air laigid a neart anns an strì.  
 Fuil mo namh cha d' iaras riamh  
 Na 'm bu mhiann leis triull an sìth.  
 Ach cuim' an cuireadh rìgh nam fasach  
 Uaill a cruas a lamh o shean

A' ni tha lathair glas fo aois  
 Feuchaibh e nach bhfaoim mi 'n sin.—  
 Na iarr gu brath corag chruaidh;  
 Ach na hob i nuair a thig.\*

*The same speech from the poem of Fingal, Book iii. v. 426,  
 published by the same:—*

Mhic mo mhic, thuairt an Ri,  
 Oskar na stri na d' oige,  
 Chunnam do chladheamh nach min;  
 Bha m' ardan mu m' shinns're mor.  
 Leansa cliu na dh' aom a chaoidh;  
 Mar d' aithreacha bi-se fein,  
 Mar Threunmor, ceud cheannard nan saoi,  
 Mar Trathal, sar athair nan treun.  
 'Nan oige bhuail iad am blar;  
 An duana nam bard tha 'n cliu.  
 Bi-se mar shruth ris na sair;  
 Ri laigse nann lann cho ciuin  
 Ri aiteal gaoth air raon an fheir.  
 Mar sin bha Treunmor nan sgiath,  
 Is Trathal ceannard nan triath;  
 Mar sin bha mo ghuioimh san t-sliabh.  
 Bha 'm feurnach rianh ri mo laimh,  
 'S dh' fhas an lag dana fo m' chruaidh.  
 Na iarsa carraid nan sgiath;  
 'S na diult i air sliabh nan cruach.

*Literal translation of the first copy, by Alexander Stewart, A. M.:*

Son of my son; thus said the king;  
 Oscar, chief of our noble youth!  
 I beheld the gleaming of thy sword  
 Like the lightning of the mountains in the storm.  
 The enemy fell beneath thy hand in the battle,  
 Like withered leaves by the blast of winter.  
 Adhere close to the fame of thy fathers,  
 And cease not to be as they have been.  
 When the victorious Trenmor lived,  
 And Trathal, the father of mighty heroes,

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\* These two lines are added after the episode.

They fought all their battles with success,  
 And obtained the praise of every contest.  
 Thus their renown shall remain in song,  
 And they shall be celebrated by bards to come.  
 Osear do thou subdue the strong arm of battle;  
 But always spare the feeble hand.  
 Be as a rapid spring-tide stream in winter  
 To resist the powerful enemies of the Feinni;  
 But be like the gentle breeze of summer  
 To those that are weak and in distress.  
 Such did Trenmor always live,  
 And such has Trathal ever been,  
 In their fair steps Comhal trod,  
 And Fingal always supported the weak.  
 In their cause would I stretch my hand,  
 With cheerfulness would I go to raise them,  
 And they should find shelter and friendship,  
 Under the blade of my glittering sword.  
 No man did I ever despise,  
 However weak his strength might be.  
 The blood of my foe I never sought,  
 If he chose to depart in peace.  
 But why should the king of the desert  
 Boast of the strength of his arm in former days?  
 This which remains, gray with age,  
 Shews I was not weak in my youth.---  
 Never search thou for hard battle;  
 But shun it not when it comes.

*Translation of the second copy, as it stands in Fingal, B. iii. :—*

Nate meo nato, fuit id quod dixit Rex,  
 Osear certaminis in tuâ juventute,  
 Vidi tuum gladium hand mollem;  
 Fuit mea superbia circa meam propaginem magnam.  
 Sectare tu gloriam eorum qui se inclinaverunt (occiderunt);  
 Sient tui proavi sis tu ipse,  
 Ut Trenmor, primus princeps heroum,  
 Ut Trathal, egregius pater strenuorum.  
 In suâ juventute (commiserunt) pureusserunt illi prælium;  
 In carminibus hardorum est eorum lans.  
 Esto tu ut flumen contra eximios;

Versus debilitatem telorum æque mitis  
 Ac aura ventorum super agello herbarum.  
 Talis fuit Trenmor scutorum,  
 Et Trathal ductor principum;  
 Talia fuere mea facta in clivo.  
 Fuit inops semper juxta meam manum,  
 Et factus est infirmus audax sub meâ durâ-chalybe.  
 Ne quære tu conflictum scutorum;  
 Et ne recusa enim in clivo præcipitiorum.

*Mr Macpherson's translation:—*

Son of my son, began the king, O Oscar, pride of youth! I saw the shining of thy sword. I gloried in my race. Pursue the fame of our fathers; be thou what they have been, when Trenmor lived, the first of men, and Trathal, the father of heroes! They fought the battle in their youth. They are the song of bards. O Oscar! bend the strong in arm: but spare the feeble hand. Be thou a stream of many tides against the foes of thy people; but like the gale, that moves the grass, to those who ask thine aid. So Trenmor lived; such Trathal was; and such has Fingal been. My arm was the support of the injured; the weak rested behind the lightning of my shield. Never search thou for battle; nor shun it when it comes."

**FINIS.**













